THE POLITICS OF PLACE IN THE WORK OF HUGH MACDIARMID

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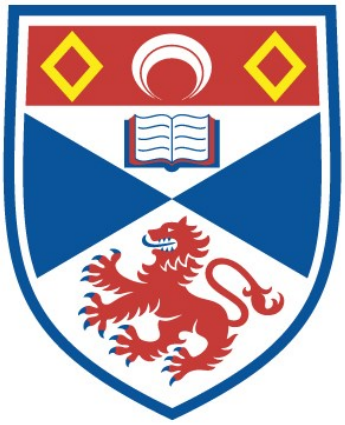
University of St Andrews



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Abstract

'The Politics of Place in the Work of Hugh MacDiarmid' argues that there is no fundamental contradiction in MacDiarmid's politics, his Scottish nationalism and international communism issuing in a radical Scottish Republicanism that synchronizes the local and universal, seeking to unify the cultural and political divisions of Scotland.

This thesis suggests that MacDiarmid challenges the metropolitan location of culture through a provincialist poetry and politics energized and exasperated by intimate relationship with home. It analyses the connections between MacDiarmid's ideological valorization of difference and the Scottish places from which his politics evolve.

Chapter One suggests that modern Scottish cultural politics is still thirled to the imperialistic dualities of the metropolitan Scottish Enlightenment. MacDiarmid's strategic essentialism reasserts an autonomous cultural and political practice that aims to make Scotland whole. The chapter traces MacDiarmid's communism to his defiance of the churchy parochialism of Langholm. Using uncollected newspaper material, Chapters Two and Three illustrate the internationalism of MacDiarmid's localism in Montrose and Whalsay.

From examining how engagement with specific places shapes MacDiarmid's politics, Chapter Four returns to analysis of the ideological construction of Scotland. The chapter explores how education has formed ideas of Scotland crucial to its political position and bound up with the specialized Scottish educational system's suppression of a Scottish Republican tradition, whose energies MacDiarmid uncovers and endeavours to release through an autodidactic generalism. Prioritizing this particularity of local culture, Chapter Five argues that the apparent contradictions in the modernist MacDiarmid's politics are best understood in terms of global capitalism's construction of mass culture, a division of labour he opposes through an internationalist poetry of generalist knowledge.

This thesis finds theoretical alliance with the internationalism of marxism and postcolonialism, synthesizing these with an autochthonous critical apparatus, declaring Hugh MacDiarmid a major modern component of a tradition of radical Scottish Republicanism.

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(i) I, Scott Ewan Lyall, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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(iii) I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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To my Father

Daniel Ewan Cameron Lyall

and

In Memory of my Mother

Elizabeth Thomson Lyall

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S.E.L.
Dundee, 2003

Contents

Abbreviations

Abbreviations of works by Hugh MacDiarmid

A	*Albyn: Shorter Books and Monographs*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996)
Annals	*Annals of the Five Senses and Other Stories, Sketches and Plays*, ed. Roderick Watson and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999)
Company	*The Company I've Kept: Essays in Autobiography* (London: Hutchison & Co., 1966)
CP1	*Complete Poems, Volume I*, ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993)
CP2	*Complete Poems, Volume II*, ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994)
CSS	*Contemporary Scottish Studies*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995; 1926)
L	*The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Alan Bold (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984)
LP	*Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994; 1943)
NSL	*New Selected Letters*, ed. Dorian Grieve, O.D. Edwards and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001)
RT1	*The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose, Volume I: 1911-1926*, ed. Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996)
RT2	*The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose, Volume II: 1927-1936*, ed. Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997)
RT3	*The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose, Volume III: 1937-1978*, ed. Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998)
SE	*Scottish Eccentrics*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993; 1936)
SP	*Selected Prose*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992)

Introduction **TOWARDS A NEW SCOTLAND**

Love of country, in me, is love of a new order.[1]

The aim of this thesis is to make sense of Hugh MacDiarmid's seemingly contradictory 'politics of place'. Declaring the importance of nationality and cultural identity to the formation of MacDiarmid's creative work, 'The Politics of Place in the Work of Hugh MacDiarmid' asserts that there is a crucial connection between his poetry and his political drive to create a new internationalist Scotland that evolves from an often refractory but always purposefully radical relationship with home.

This point may seem obvious in examination of a poet who so strongly identifies himself with Scotland. There is little danger, after all, of MacDiarmid's work being easily assimilated into the canonical realms of 'English Literature', an academic area that this radical Scottish nationalist is still largely excluded from. As Scottish political self-determination remains a live issue, a distinct Scottish cultural identity and Scottish literature's contribution to cultural movements such as modernism remains generally unacknowledged by metropolitan critics disinclined to attribute the importance of the diverse accents of the Scots to the powerful constitution of their own cultural and political domain. However, appalled by the parochialism of vision issuing from his country's attachment to English metropolitanism, MacDiarmid sometimes also neglects to admit the influence of Scottish cultural and political traditions on his work, behaving as if his poetry springs solely from his individual genius. This thesis argues that through his ideological and actual interaction with Scottish place MacDiarmid formulates a radically nationalist politics that challenges Scotland's provincialization and moves towards a new internationalist Scotland.

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[1] *CP2*, p. 1191 ('Direadh III').

Examining MacDiarmid's attempts to ideologically reconstruct a nation he believes to be provincialized through Union with England and by the dictates of international capitalism, this thesis will address itself to the specificities of Scottish place in his work and the poetry and politics that issue from his irascible identification with Scotland. It will achieve this by studying MacDiarmid in Langholm, Montrose and Whalsay, with particular emphasis on his decade in Angus in the 1920s and Shetland in the thirties. Through engagement with these local environments, this thesis will argue, MacDiarmid develops an internationalist politics through which to envision a radical Scottish Republic.

'The Politics of Place in the Work of Hugh MacDiarmid' contends that the poet's ideological influence still powerfully, if subliminally, resounds in Scottish cultural politics a quarter of a century after his death in 1978. Considering MacDiarmid's legacy, Kenneth Buthlay believes, 'The inter-relationship between his work and the rise of Scottish Nationalism, an altogether deeper matter than the recorded history of political parties, will always be beyond calculation.'[2] However, despite his importance to modern Scottish culture, criticism of MacDiarmid's work has been and remains, even in Scotland, scarce. Examination of his politics has tended to emphasize a supposedly crippling irreconcilability in his positions, particularly with regard to his Scottish nationalism and communism. According to Andrew Marr for instance, 'MacDiarmid's politics were extreme, often contradictory and almost entirely devoid of common sense'.[3] This view of MacDiarmid's ideological capriciousness is captured by Hamish Henderson in 'To Hugh MacDiarmid' – 'Just what *do* you stand for, MacDiarmid? I'm still not certain'.[4]

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[2] Kenneth Buthlay, *Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve)*, Scottish Writers Series, series ed. David Daiches (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982), p. 134.
[3] Andrew Marr, *The Battle for Scotland* (London: Penguin, 1995; 1992), p. 75.
[4] Hamish Henderson, 'To Hugh MacDiarmid', *Collected Poems and Songs*, ed. Raymond Ross (Edinburgh: Curly Snake Publishing, 2000), p. 120.

Writing of 'The Marxist Poet', David Craig considers MacDiarmid's communism to be illustrative of 'the inconsistencies typical of his thinking'.[5] However, Craig believes that the 1930s poetry has a 'truly Marxist intellectual content'.[6] He understands that MacDiarmid's radicalism in the thirties has greater depth than that illustrated by the 'clever-clever style' of 'MacSpauden', but through strict adherence to a materialist analysis Craig fails to discern the spirituality of MacDiarmid's communism.[7] Douglas Young's 'The Nationalism of Hugh MacDiarmid' recognizes the 'twofold principle of Nationalism and Internationalism' central to MacDiarmid's Scottish nationalism.[8] However, appearing back-to-back in the 1962 festschrift, the essays of Craig and Young illustrate the unhelpful ideological rupturing of MacDiarmid's Scottish nationalism and international communism.

Duncan Glen's *Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve) and the Scottish Renaissance* (1964) adopts a historical approach through which to analyse the poet's politics. Glen thinks that 'MacDiarmid's political affinities [...] appear to be a strange conglomeration of political beliefs'.[9] However, by foregrounding the visionary poet at the expense of the theoretical and political thinker, Glen does little to unravel the apparent political inconsistencies in MacDiarmid's thought. Ann Edwards Boutelle in *Thistle and Rose: A Study of Hugh MacDiarmid's Poetry* (1980) also emphasizes MacDiarmid's paradoxical political vision: 'His political career has been as consistently paradoxical as his poetic career.'[10] Boutelle situates what she perceives to be MacDiarmid's paradoxicalness in his childhood family relations in Langholm.

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[5] David Craig, 'The Marxist Poet', *Hugh MacDiarmid: a festschrift*, ed. K.D. Duval and Sydney Goodsir Smith (Edinburgh: K.D. Duval, 1962), p. 97.
[6] Craig, 'The Marxist Poet', *Hugh MacDiarmid: a festschrift*, p. 87.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Douglas Young, 'The Nationalism of Hugh MacDiarmid', *Hugh MacDiarmid: a festschrift*, p. 107.
[9] Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve) and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh & London: Chambers, 1964), p. 124.
[10] Ann Edwards Boutelle, *Thistle and Rose: A Study of Hugh MacDiarmid's Poetry* (Loanhead: MacDonald, 1980), p. 196.

Stephen Maxwell in 'The Nationalism of Hugh MacDiarmid' looks at MacDiarmid's nationalism from the early 1920s in Montrose to the evolution of the John Maclean line on Whalsay. Maxwell sees the poet's Scotland as a 'mental construct', a place of the mind designed to be 'an exemplar of universal intellectual and aesthetic qualities'.[11] As such, Maxwell thinks that 'MacDiarmid's impact on Scottish political opinion has been slight'.[12] In 'MacDiarmid and Politics', Neal Ascherson points to what he believes to be MacDiarmid's racism, claiming that 'in politics he wasted time trying to prove Scotland's superiority over England'.[13] Ascherson traces MacDiarmid's Red Republicanism to the influence of Calvin. Catherine Kerrigan's *Whaur Extremes Meet: The Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid 1920-1934* (1983) provides a useful historical perspective, but splits the poet's politics chronologically, analysing MacDiarmid's 'Scottish Nationalism' and 'Dialectical Materialism' in separate chapters.[14] Alan Riach opens up new ground in *Hugh MacDiarmid's Epic Poetry* (1991), linking MacDiarmid's poetry of knowledge, particularly *In Memoriam James Joyce*, to his communism.[15]

This thesis makes use of Carcanet's excellent MacDiarmid 2000 series, only examining manuscript material in the case of the highly germane and largely unexplored 'Red Scotland'. The over-abundance of MacDiarmid manuscripts, particularly in the National Library of Scotland, limits the scope of research to mainly published works. While most critics have somewhat neutered the poet's politics by stressing his contradictory thinking, this thesis argues for the important relatedness of MacDiarmid's politics. The thesis contends that both his nationalism and communism

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[11] Stephen Maxwell, 'The Nationalism of Hugh MacDiarmid', *The Age of MacDiarmid: Essays on Hugh MacDiarmid and his Influence on Contemporary Scotland*, ed. P.H. Scott and A.C. Davis (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1980), p. 202.
[12] Maxwell, 'The Nationalism of Hugh MacDiarmid', *The Age of MacDiarmid*, p. 222.
[13] Neal Ascherson, 'MacDiarmid and Politics', *The Age of MacDiarmid*, p. 232.
[14] Catherine Kerrigan, *Whaur Extremes Meet: The Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid 1920-1934* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1983), Chs. 10 & 11.
[15] Alan Riach, *Hugh MacDiarmid's Epic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

develop from an active and ideological engagement with Scottish place, symbiotically issuing in a radical Scottish Republican politics of place.

MacDiarmid understood his political importance to Scotland. Writing from Whalsay to Neil Gunn, MacDiarmid asserts that even at this distance from the mainland he is 'the most powerful non-Conservative personal force in Scotland today'.[16] On leaving school in Langholm in 1908 at the age of sixteen MacDiarmid became a member of the Independent Labour Party; he helped to found the National Party of Scotland in 1928 while in Montrose; and the nationalist poet, convinced while in Whalsay of the synchronous relationship between the local and the universal, the national and the international, joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1934 and gave fresh ideological voice to a radical tradition of Scottish Republicanism. Yet for all this political group activity, the use of the adjective 'personal' in the same letter to Gunn suggests that MacDiarmid recognized himself to be something of a rebelliously lone voice. As a poet, he conceived his work to have 'a powerful influence because it springs from the deeps of the destined'.[17]

Such egotism, encouraged by his elect Calvinist sense of self and the corresponding importance of his poetic mission to recreate Scotland in his own radical image, helps explain the lapses into solipsism of MacDiarmid's more extremist political positions. This subjective idealism may be a trap of which all poets and intellectuals must beware, drawn to the utopianism of grand communitarian design by the undeniably solitary nature of writing. However, MacDiarmid was politicized as a poet by his experience as a young man from a peripheral nation of the imperial First World War, his political ambitions for Scotland shaped also by the Easter Rising in Ireland (1916) and the Russian Revolution (1917). MacDiarmid believed Scottish

[16] *L*, p. 254 (to Neil M. Gunn, 25 November 1933).
[17] *L*, p. 298 (to R.E. Muirhead, 5 November 1928).

independence to be worthless without concomitantly freeing the nation from the rule of a capitalist class. He would have understood Yeats's 'Parnell':

> Parnell came down the road, he said to a cheering
> man:
> 'Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break
> stone.'[18]

For MacDiarmid, the radical Scottish internationalist, there can be no bourgeois division between literature and politics:

> In this connection it must be remembered that all my work hangs together – my poetry and my general propaganda are parts of each other: and I am unquestionably doing far more for Scotland when my activity issues in poetry rather than in any other form.[19]

It is the contention of this thesis that there is no fundamental contradiction at the heart of MacDiarmid's politics of place, his Scottish nationalism and international communism issuing in a radical Scottish Republicanism. As Neal Ascherson says, 'Communist and Nationalist. The very words are supposed to be at war, and yet MacDiarmid made out of their collision a fusion.'[20] Such a synthesis implies an underlying political unity in MacDiarmid's most productively important poetic periods: the 1920s in Scottish Renaissance Montrose and the thirties in Whalsay, where he moved towards the radical John Maclean-inspired Scottish Republican line. The first phase contains within itself the seeds of the next, as MacDiarmid suggests in 1927:

> This saltatory emergence of a Socialist preponderance in the Scottish representation [at Westminster] is a post-war product, and is interpreted from a Renaissance point of view as a significant reassertion of the old Scottish radicalism and republicanism.[21]

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[18] W.B. Yeats, 'Parnell', *Collected Poems* (London: Picador, in association with Macmillan, 1990; 1933), p. 359.
[19] *L*, p. 297 (to R.E. Muirhead, 5 November 1928).
[20] Ascherson, 'MacDiarmid and Politics', *The Age of MacDiarmid*, p. 226.
[21] *A*, p. 2 ('Albyn: or Scotland and the Future').

In his desire to see Scotland whole, to unify what he perceives to be a dualistically fractured national culture, a poet noted for political extremism sometimes attempts to be all things to everyone. This is illustrated at the beginning of one of his most important manifesto-pieces from 1927, 'Albyn: or Scotland and the Future':

> The forces that are moving towards a Scottish Renaissance are complex and at first sight incompatible. The movement began as a purely literary movement some seven or eight years ago, but of necessity speedily acquired political and then religious bearings. It is now manifesting itself in every sphere of national arts and affairs, and is at once radical and conservative, revolutionary and reactionary.[22]

In his wish to bring everybody on board the ship setting sail towards Scottish political independence and cultural reinvigoration by 'traversing the accepted conceptions of all things Scottish', MacDiarmid somewhat overdoes the scope and concertedness of Scottish Renaissance: it is, perhaps, MacDiarmid the theorist who renders it a movement.[23]

Similarly, in an eccentrically wide-ranging essay from 1931-2, 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea', MacDiarmid posits seemingly incompatible ideas of freedom. Beginning by citing Gregory Smith's 'zigzag of contradictions' as an essence peculiar to Scottish literature, MacDiarmid then uncharacteristically laments the absence 'of a truly *British* tradition' due to imperialistic 'English ascendancy', before optimistically asserting a postcolonial politics of place:

> Ireland's breakaway – its power to sunder itself in the teeth of the entrenched English power – is one of the happy signs that all may not yet be lost. I welcome like tendencies in India, Egypt, South Africa and elsewhere, and think it is high time Scotland in particular was realizing what it is all about in terms not only of the crucial and immediate problems of our own country but in terms of world politics.[24]

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[22] *A*, p. 1 ('Albyn: or Scotland and the Future').
[23] Ibid.
[24] MacDiarmid, 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea', *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Duncan Glen (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 58, 62.

As Chapter Three of this thesis shows, MacDiarmid's Gaelic Idea promotes the value of national difference in the face of the economic and cultural might of the world's imperial nations. Yet, later in his essay, the marxist MacDiarmid finds a correspondence between this anti-imperial nationalism and Hitler's racially supremacist *Blutsgefühl*:

> Scottish nationalists – especially in view of the ascendancy in Anglo-Scottish politics of a Labour-cum-socialist electoral majority in Scotland, or, at all events in the more densely populated and commercially and industrially important centres, and the particular hatred which Scottish nationalism inspires in Labour-cum-socialist circles – ought to consider carefully the principle which Hitler and his National Socialists in Germany oppose to Marxism. Hitler's 'Nazis' wear their socialism with precisely the difference which post-socialist Scottish nationalists must adopt. Class-consciousness is anathema to them, and in contradistinction to it they set up the principle of race-consciousness.[25]

A charitable interpretation of this is that the irreconcilability of such extremist ideas suggests an eclecticism arising from MacDiarmid's desire 'to rouse a distinctive and dynamic spirit in Scotland again' which will transcend 'the identification of minor and transitory manifestations with the terms "Scotland" and "Scottish"'.[26]

MacDiarmid's desire to waken Scotland from its bourgeois, parochial torpor and make whole the fractures of the past rests on his understanding of the crucial correspondence between the local and the universal: 'Nationalism and Socialism are by no means incompatible, and to rationalise a belief in both is no great task for any ordinary intelligence.'[27] As a radical, internationally minded nationalist who deplores the cultural and political consequences of a dualistically ruptured Scotland, a provincialized nation that has abrogated its independent role in world affairs through Union with England, MacDiarmid's desire to reunite the severed local and universal in Scottish experience ostensibly leads to a split political personality. Yet, as George

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[25] MacDiarmid, *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid*, p. 70.
[26] Ibid., pp. 73, 72.
[27] *RT1*, p. 208 ('Connolly, Bakunin, Mussolini, and Others').

Konrád and Ivan Szelényi point out, such apparent inconsistency is a recognizable phenomenon:

> Often the schizophrenia inherent in the intellectual's role is apparent in one and the same individual. The greatest of them incorporate the contradictions between their generic and genetic roles into the antinomies of their thought – which does not by any means prove that their thinking is inconsistent.[28]

This useful quote, which will recur in Chapter Five's extended discussion of 'MacDiarmid and the Masses', appositely captures MacDiarmid's political thinking, his nationalism and communism, ordinarily seen as clashing ideologies, finding coalescence in a radical Scottish Republicanism.

The surface incongruities of MacDiarmid's politics of place derive from his opposition to what he believes to be Scotland's Union-derived provincialization: an absolutist MacDiarmid wants a confidently international nation undivided by such historical fissures. Distrustful of metropolitan pretensions to universalism, understanding this to be the imperialistic ruse of a dominant core culture, MacDiarmid argues for the cultural significance and political independence of the peripheries, what Tom Nairn calls 'the small battalions'.[29] Today's idea of core and peripheral cultures has sociological roots in the American Michael Hechter's *Internal Colonialism: the Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (1975). Hechter argues that 'there are two collectivities or objectively distinct cultural groups' which are central to an understanding of national development in the industrial era:

> (1) the *core*, or dominant cultural group which occupies territory extending from the political center of the society (e.g. the locus of the central government) outward to those territories largely occupied by the subordinate, or (2) *peripheral* cultural group.[30]

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[28] George Konrád and Ivan Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, trans. Andrew Arato and Richard E. Allen (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979), pp. 22-3.
[29] See Tom Nairn, *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited* (London & New York: Verso, 1997), Part III.
[30] Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: the Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 18.

While this analysis is useful in its definition of terms, it suffers somewhat from a tendency to see 'collectivities' as either black or white, being 'objectively distinct' and 'perfectly solidary', Hechter believing that 'oppressed minorities' have a straight choice between 'assimilationism *versus* nationalism'.[31]

More recent theories of a postcolonial tendency have emphasized the cultural fluidity between core and periphery. Most notably, Robert Crawford's *Devolving English Literature* (1992) stresses the links between numbers of English-speaking peripheral places whose provincial writers, nonetheless, show a concern 'to enunciate a cultural identity that is not that of the traditionally dominant London-Oxbridge cultural centre'.[32] MacDiarmid is one such 'provincial' writer in both place of birth and anti-metropolitan political stance who concurrently opposes the provincialization of Scotland through its relations with the core culture. According to MacDiarmid, Scottish writers in a marginalized nation

> are forced
> Either to distort the content of Scottish life
> In order to make it conform
> To some desperate personal wish-fulfilment
> Or flee from it entirely – into the past,
> Into fantasy, or some other reality-surrogate.[33]

A potentially internationalist nation is buried in the Barrie-inspired kailyard of a provincial Lowland Scotland and asleep in a Scott-induced touristy Highland dreamscape. MacDiarmid's conception of a true metaphysical Scotland released from false, anglicized cultural construction is examined in theoretical relation to postcolonial and marxist ideas of national identity in Chapter One of this thesis.

MacDiarmid's radical Scottish Republicanism also requires some 'wish-fulfilment' in order to have electoral plausibility in a nation that stubbornly adheres to

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[31] Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, pp. 18, xvii.
[32] Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 7.
[33] *CP1*, p. 636 ('To the Younger Scottish Writers').

the Union and gives continued allegiance to the 'glamour of backwardness' that is Ukanian royalism.[34] The dreichly depressing sight of Scotland's newly elected representatives being ordered to rise for the Queen at the opening of the devolved Scottish Parliament in 1999, some only taking the pledge to Her Majesty under protest that their real loyalty lay with the people of Scotland, then singing along with Burns's egalitarian 'For a' that and a' that', illustrates the continuing divisive dualism at the heart of Scottish (and British) political culture. As Murdo Macdonald states, 'The assertion of the limited power of the monarch is a recurrent theme in Scottish history, finding its first expression in the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320.'[35] MacDiarmid summons the spirit of the Declaration and aims to heal the dualistic split with a radical Scottish Republican politics of place that makes mock of Tony Blair's overpriced devolved parish council:

> There surely is the answer to the particular kind of treachery found in those Anglo-Scots intellectuals who bleat of a false antithesis, internationalism, not nationalism, as if it were possible to have the one without the other. They sin against the universal law of life which invests life in individuals not conglomerations. [...] In the place of living separate identities, having mostly their differences in common, these ghouls would reduce all to a horrible international, characterless, abstract fog, a devitalized nonentity, but their internationalism in fact equals 'English', and behind the pseudo-internationalism of the Anglo-Scots lurks the face of 'The Auld Enemy', English imperialism.[36]

MacDiarmid understood back in 1929 that 'The devolutionary proposals of the Liberal and Socialist parties are hopelessly behind the times', Home Rule being a political means of 'permanently provincialising' Scotland by Unionists seeking to counteract 'the emergence of a distinctive Scottish National idea' which appreciates that 'True internationalism, and true nationalism go hand in hand'.[37] Scotland may not

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[34] See Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy* (London: Vintage, 1994; 1988).
[35] Murdo Macdonald, *Scottish Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), p. 51.
[36] *A*, p. 341 ('A Political Speech: transcription from a recording taken at the 1320 Club Symposium, Glasgow University, 6 April 1968').
[37] *RT2*, p. 75 ('Scottish Nationalism versus Socialism').

be the politically independent socialist republic that MacDiarmid desired, but the renewed cultural vitality in the years since the poet's death – the cultural hope in spite of the political facts of, for instance, Alasdair Gray's Scottish Cooperative Wholesale Republic: 'Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation'; Robert Alan Jamieson following Cairns Craig in 'A Formal Declaration of Cultural Independence'; and Angus Calder writing 'Notes from the Scottish Republic' in a pluralistically *Revolving Culture* (1994) – owes much to the invigorating spirit of his Scottish Republican politics of place.[38]

MacDiarmid's insistence that the Scots are more internationalist in comparison with what he believed, or wanted to believe, to be the insularity of the English certainly smacks of over-compensatory and self-deluding chauvinism, but also arises from the provincial's (Other-induced) understanding of the provinciality of metropolitanism, the parochialism of the cultural and political core. His radical Scottish Republicanism seeks to internationalize a marginalized national culture blinded to its potential independence by the false, imperialistic universalism of the cultural and political centre. According to Christopher Harvie, however, MacDiarmid's movement towards a new Scotland is no modernist vision:

> Intellectually the Renaissance was archaic. Its ambitions were democratic, internationalist, scientific, and socialist, but at a time when urbanization and mass culture – housing, industrial change, cinema, and radio – was determining a new politics, it was actually less urban than Hume, Smith, Ferguson, and the literati had been; its ambitions utopian and remote from modern Scotland.[39]

Importantly, in listing the 'ambitions' of the Scottish Renaissance, Harvie omits one pivotal idea – that it was also nationalist. Even if significant figures in the movement,

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[38] Gray is quoting Dennis Lee; Robert Alan Jamieson, 'MacDiarmid's Spirit Burns On', *Chapman* 69-70 (MacDiarmid Centenary Issue, Autumn 1992), p. 7; Angus Calder, *Revolving Culture: Notes from the Scottish Republic* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 1994).
[39] Christopher Harvie, *Scotland: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 193.

such as Lewis Grassic Gibbon, were not politically nationalist, most shared MacDiarmid's sense of the cultural importance of place.

In this the Renaissance movement is crucially modern. In what Cairns Craig calls our 'post-age', the grand narratives of international progress piloting the transcendent flight of Hegel's world spirit of historical consciousness, such as the Enlightenment and marxism, are challenged by 'a value which is grounded outside of the historical trajectory as it has been defined by Western ideology'.[40] The totalitarian ubiquity of historical time is defied in a postcolonial era by the stubbornly immovable autochthony of place. This is what MacDiarmid means when he writes in *Lucky Poet* (1943) of Culloden and the Highland Clearances:

> 'Incompatible with British civilization' may well mean vital to the new order about to supplant that civilization. The chief of these hitherto vanquished ideas perhaps is just the denial of the present general assumption that 'History had to happen', and, with it, of the idea of Progress.[41]

MacDiarmid's idea of progress combines a marxian spiritual evolutionism that seeks the emancipation of the masses from capitalist culture's intellectual short-circuiting of consciousness with a metaphysical nationalist's commitment to exorcize an ambiguous imperialist legacy and make Scotland whole. Harvie is correct to point to the small town, rural localism of the Scottish Renaissance. As Chapters Two and Three of this thesis illustrate, MacDiarmid's best creative work issues from Montrose in the 1920s and Whalsay in the thirties.

Crucially, it is also through engagement with these peripheral places that MacDiarmid develops a political strategy with which to resist the symbiotic assault of anglification and capitalism and so build a radically nationalist Scotland. Rejecting the

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[40] Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), pp. 207, 224.
[41] *LP*, p. 210.

Enlightenment metropolitanism favoured by Harvie, the provincial MacDiarmid believes that

> All the big centres of mankind are like thunder-clouds to-day
> Forming part of the horrific structure of a storm
> That fills the whole sky – but ere long
> Will disappear like the fabric of a dream.[42]

This vision of the moral bankruptcy of metropolitan centres, specifically Edinburgh's 'terrible inability to speak out' as a world capital, doesn't lessen the impact of the internationalism central to the poet's political vision of a new Scotland.[43] For MacDiarmid, seemingly peripheral nations like Scotland 'are too apt to be dismissed by the believers in big units as [...] of no particular consequence in relation to the major problems of modern times'.[44] MacDiarmid imagines that

> This little country can overcome the whole world of wrong
> As the Lacedaemonians the armies of Persia.
> Cornwall – Gaeldom – must stand for the ending
> Of the essential immorality of any man controlling
> Any other – for the ending of all Government
> Since all Government is a monopoly of violence[45]

He hopes that the nation will bid goodbye to the defeated Celticism of the past by uncovering the hidden tradition of radical Scottish Republicanism:

> The day is not far distant when the Scottish people
> Will enter into this heritage, and in so doing
> Enrich the heritage of all mankind again.[46]

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[42] *CP2*, p. 1156 ('Talking with Five Thousand People in Edinburgh').
[43] Ibid.
[44] *A*, p. 340 ('A Political Speech: transcription from a recording taken at the 1320 Club Symposium, Glasgow University, 6 April 1968').
[45] *CP2*, p. 1043 ('The Glass of Pure Water').
[46] *CP2*, p. 1126 ('Good-bye Twilight').

In rejecting nationalism Scotland 'has thrown her hand in', simultaneously renouncing the internationalism of MacDiarmid's radical Scottish Republican politics of place; as such 'Alba produces a wretched alibi / At the bar of human history'.[47]

This nationalist idea of the importance of maintaining and promoting the particularity of cultural and political difference for the civilizational good of the international whole can also be usefully applied to the regions and small towns within a nation. The metaphysical MacDiarmid's visionary desire to see a new internationalist Scotland combines with his practical work in Montrose as a socialist councillor and his consistent, lifelong political propagandizing in lectures and journalism. *The Raucle Tongue* in three volumes shows the impressive extent of MacDiarmid's concern with developing the theoretical ground for the emergence of an independent Scottish Republic. Chapter Two of this thesis hopes to extend the excellent work of Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach by illustrating the way in which MacDiarmid's work for the *Montrose Review* interacts with his poetic and political purpose of refashioning Scotland along internationalist lines. This thesis suggests that the visionary MacDiarmid and his theoretical correlate cannot be separated, the poet, political thinker and journalist at one in working from the margins for a new Scotland. Montrose may lack the intellectual illustriousness of the enlightened Athens of the North, and Whalsay does not carry the economic and industrial significance of the second city of the Empire but, nonetheless, from these small places come art and ideas that productively challenge metropolitan perceptions and politics, potentially leading to national Renaissance. As Harvie realistically states, 'a renaissance on a Florentine scale, which transforms an entire culture, requires patronage provided by economic growth, or political institutions that encourage the

[47] *CP2*, p. 1311 ('The Glen of Silence').

artists involved'.[48] Such a revolutionary change is postulated by MacDiarmid's radical Scottish Republican politics of place.

'The Politics of Place in the Work of Hugh MacDiarmid' examines the poet as a political activist and cultural theorist of continuing importance in Scotland and internationally. As pointed out by Tom Leonard, the prioritization of MacDiarmid's politics can be used as a 'reason not to see poetry as expression from one individual universally to another, but as some kind of "contribution to Modern Scottish literature"'.[49] While aware of the philistine pitfalls of such a position, the thesis emphasizes MacDiarmid's politics in the belief that 'the aesthetic experience [should] be left private to the individual', not through any complacent conviction that art is necessarily of less consequence than politics.[50] Methodologically, the thesis tentatively aims to combine postcolonialism and marxism, whilst attempting to retain a working-class provincial's sceptical independence from the university-bred metropolitanism of each theory. Academic theories, including those issuing from the Left, often seem to people outside the university system to be intellectuals talking to themselves, with little real connection to the object of their purportedly liberationist drive. Marx was wrong to ascribe a potentially revolutionary universalism to the working class. It is the middle class of capitalism who speak a common language, whether of academia, business, politics, or accentually (even in a multinational state such as the United Kingdom), and who are mobile enough – electronically, educationally, financially and so on – to universalize their professional interests. In general, it is they who are truly international and the working class who are fundamentally national, not necessarily in their patriotic heart of hearts but simply through the basic economic facts of life. The

[48] Christopher Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes: Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000; 1981), p. 135.
[49] Tom Leonard, *Reports from the Present: Selected Work 1982-94* (London: Cape, 1995), p. 235.
[50] Leonard, *Reports from the Present*, p. 26.

theoretical designs of some radical academics illustrate such middle-class 'universalism'.

The contemporary specialized academic system of capitalism encourages the theoretical training of a body of students entering its civil society to recognize a 'reactionary' or 'fascist' at a hundred paces, shooting down debate in advance of argument in the name of a vaunted pluralism or political correctness that may be little more than the *Guardian*esque complacency of comfortably middle-class metropolitans ill at ease or merely ignorant of the cultural difference of the geopolitical margins. As the radical Scottish Republican MacDiarmid of *Lucky Poet* says, 'the Capitalist Press, &c., has far less objection to Socialism than to Nationalism'.[51] This same professionalized academic discourse discourages the artistic wild card, preferring the ideologically safe, supremely qualified professor-poet. It is MacDiarmid's creative working-class autodidactism, stemming from the generalist traditions of an older metaphysical Scotland, which uncovers the hidden tradition of radical Scottish Republicanism that the poet believes points towards a new Scotland. This thesis is explicit in its Scottish Republicanism, positing MacDiarmid's work as a major component of what James D. Young calls 'Scotland's hidden cultural history': an alignment of Scottish nationalism and international socialism in a radical Scottish Republican politics of place.[52]

Of all MacDiarmid's critics it is, perhaps, Alan Riach who has best discerned the potential cultural implications of the poet's politics of place: 'MacDiarmid's aesthetics may be prophetic of the post-colonial literature of the modern world.'[53] Using native and non-native critics, this thesis explores the ways in which MacDiarmid challenges

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[51] *LP*, p. 171.
[52] James D. Young, *The Very Bastards of Creation: Scottish-International Radicalism: A Biographical Study, 1707-1995* (Glasgow: Clydeside Press, [1996 (?)]), p. 21.
[53] Alan Riach, 'Demolition Man', Introduction to *CSS*, p. xxx.

the metropolitan location of culture in his work – poetry, prose and journalism – and in the practice of his manifold cultural and political activities.

Chapter One examines the 'debatable land' of modern Scottish cultural politics through the lens of recent postcolonial and marxist theories, exploring the ways in which Scottish identity has been influenced by MacDiarmid's work. It contends that MacDiarmid adopts a strategic essentialism that seeks the revelation of the real Scotland hidden by ideological anglicization and the metropolitan bias of the Scottish Enlightenment. MacDiarmid seeks to reconcile the dualisms of the Enlightenment – the movement's sundering of the local and universal, its marginalization of a distinctly Scottish tradition of culture and politics through an imperialist Othering of large parts of its own country – with the search for the metaphysical Scot undertaken in Scottish Renaissance Montrose and the uncovering of the hidden tradition of radical Scottish Republicanism in Whalsay. Each movement in MacDiarmid's political ideas illustrates his engagement with the dichotomous Enlightenment while striving to make whole Scotland's schizoid state.

MacDiarmid's thinking with regard to Scottish cultural politics is broadly exemplified in the living practice of his two most propitious poetic periods: Montrose in the 1920s and Whalsay in the thirties. Chapter Two explores MacDiarmid's activities in Montrose, in particular his journalism for the local newspapers and his work for Montrose Council. Through examination of previously uncollected material from the *Montrose Review* and the *Montrose Standard* the chapter asserts that the cultural and political internationalism of the Scottish Renaissance is profitably powered by the committed localism of the modernist MacDiarmid in Montrose.

Chapter Three moves with MacDiarmid to Whalsay in Shetland during the civilization crisis of the 'devil's decade', the 1930s, and argues that with the loss of the active communitarianism he pursued in Montrose the poet evolves an anti-

metropolitan, spiritualized Celtic communism. Remote from mainland Scotland, he concocts the Gaelic Idea as a means to defend a periphery under threat from the subsumptive power of metropolitan capital. The chapter suggests that even from the marginality of Whalsay MacDiarmid retains his internationalism, finding autodidactic inspiration in John Maclean in order to formulate a radical Scottish Republican politics of place.

Proceeding from analysis of how MacDiarmid's localism influences his designs for a new internationalist politics of place, Chapter Four returns to ideological examination of Scotland. Exploring the self-taught poet's attitude to the Scottish education system, doctrinal control of which MacDiarmid understands to be crucial to political governance of the nation, the chapter argues that it is through his adherence to the generalism of the Scottish democratic intellect that he uncovers the tradition of radical Scottish Republicanism hidden by educational anglicization and capitalist specialization. Chapter Five challenges the conventional view of MacDiarmid as an elitist. It argues that the surface contradictions of MacDiarmid's political thinking are not peculiar to this modernist poet but are intrinsic to the nature of capitalism, its cultural division of labour exemplified in the creation of an intellectually retarding mass culture. The chapter contends that MacDiarmid's autodidactic generalism, drawn from the traditions of a metaphysical Scotland, opposes the professionalized specialization of culture. Confronting the monoglot nature of a global capital that represents a false internationalism, MacDiarmid writes an internationalist poetry of generalist knowledge asserting a radically autonomous politics of place, so emphasizing the particularity of local culture and the civilizational importance of difference.

This thesis moves from examination of modern Scottish cultural politics to specific localities within the nation – Langholm, Montrose, Whalsay – back to Scottish

education and on to international capitalism's denial of local cultural and political diversity. A future thesis may consider to what extent non-Scottish places – Salonika, Macedonia, South Wales, London – shape MacDiarmid's politics of place. However, in one work of no more than a hundred thousand words the scope of research is clearly finite, and it is indisputable that Scotland is the most important place in MacDiarmid's politics.

From the divisive dualism of Scottish culture to the dialectic of capitalism's totalistic depredations issues Hugh MacDiarmid's radical Scottish Republican politics of place. Ostensibly writing to William Power, MacDiarmid imagines an 'ideal figure', an individual reminiscent of himself, who is 'an inveterate foe / Of bigness, jingoism, and regimentation' and who uncovers this radical Scottish Republican tradition, a hidden casualty of the injurious dualities of Scottish history and the conceptual contestation that is the cultural politics of modern capitalism:

> out of the past
> He brought to life again all those
> Who had lived through that developing history
> And yet asserted life – George Buchanan, Arthur Johnstone,
> Thomas Muir (*Thomas* Muir – not *Edwin* Muir),
> William Livingstone, John Murdoch, John Maclean – and showed how these
> Create for us a tradition, inspire us with faith,
> Help us to find new gods
> To replace the old we cannot worship.[54]

[54] *CP1*, pp. 704, 699 ('The Kulturkampf').

Chapter 1 **DEBATABLE LAND**

> In starting this survey it is necessary to clear our minds of some prepossession. The terms 'Scot,' 'Scottish,' 'Scotland,' taken in their full modern significance, may lead the reader astray, unless he is careful to make certain adjustments.[1]

Modern Scottish identity and cultural politics have been powered and profitably problematized by Hugh MacDiarmid's politics of place. This chapter suggests that the poet inherits a dualistically ruptured cultural and political 'debatable land' that he seeks to make whole through a radical Scottish Republicanism. In its examination of theories of modern Scottish identity this chapter also illustrates one crucial part of MacDiarmid's intellectual legacy, the critical debatable land of modern Scottish cultural politics.

For MacDiarmid, a series of ruptures in Scottish history – the Reformation, the Unions with England in 1603 and 1707 and the Anglophone, metropolitan bias of the Scottish Enlightenment – open up a damagingly dualistic split in the national culture. In particular, with the removal of Scottish independent statehood to London and the subsequent Enlightenment self-repression of a distinctly Scottish cultural voice, a potentially internationalist nation is provincialized through adherence to the false universalism of the imperial metropolis. Scotland and the Scots become double, international when British, provincial when Scottish. The nation is both imperialist and colonial. Industrially advanced in Lowland reality, it is also romantically retrogressive in Highland myth; a place people pragmatically leave to build a more prosperous future elsewhere, but sentimentally return to in order to trace their Scottish roots. The nation's true Scottish Republican self as MacDiarmid envisions it – internationalist, politically radical and culturally modernist – is dwarfed by a political

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[1] G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1919), p. 72.

Union that is actually an extension of English nationalism 'or that variant and projection of it, British Imperialism', supported by canny Anglo-Scots who are the civic weeds of a cultural kailyard consisting 'o' bagpipes, haggis, and sheep's heids'.[2]

Arguably, Scotland is still a place that has not yet fully decided its political future. The devolutionary 'settled will of the Scottish people', formulated in legalistic language by the late John Smith, remains a contested constitutional framework. As explained in the Introduction, it is the contention of this thesis that MacDiarmid's influence on the cultural and political Scottish scene remains potent. The autodidact poet believed that a national intelligentsia was urgently required in order to stimulate the critical debates necessary for cultural and political reinvigoration. This chapter recognizes that MacDiarmid's conception of the national culture as being fissured and failed is now refreshingly disputed by many Scottish intellectuals seeking to move beyond the cultural and political negativity of the past.[3] By examining some of the most important examples of such contemporary criticism, this chapter also acknowledges that MacDiarmid has helped inspire a theoretical debatable land of cultural politics through which the present Scottish executive order can be challenged.

By focusing on the essentializing dualisms of the Enlightenment, famously expounded in a literary context by G. Gregory Smith's Caledonian antisyzygy, this chapter argues that MacDiarmid's thinking with regard to Scottish culture and identity inherits the imperial dualisms of the Enlightenment while seeking their transcendence. His work both challenges and mirrors metropolitan politics, the strategic essentialism of his totalizing ambitions an attempt to make whole the ruptures of the Scottish past. MacDiarmid's friend, the philosopher George Elder Davie, claims that the poet would have been scornful of the current obsession, particularly within academia, with

[2] *RT2*, p. 50 ('Backward *Forward*'); *CP1*, p. 106 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[3] Particularly impressive in this regard is Polygon's *Determinations* series developed by Cairns Craig.

political correctness.[4] While Davie's point is understandable with regard to MacDiarmid's essentialist and masculine nationalist conception of cultural and practical politics, it is contradicted by a later mature art that seeks to combine a postcolonial politics of left utopianism with artistic animadversion in an anti-imperial poetry of generalist knowledge that is almost unrecognizable in spirit from the debatable land of much contemporary theory.

Broadly, MacDiarmid's politics of place move from the essentialist, metaphysical nationalism of the Scots poetry, written mainly in Montrose – from where he seeks the revelation of the real Scotland indistinguishable from his own self-image – to the more anti-essentialist, international eclecticism of his synthetic poetry of facts, begun by the communist poet in Whalsay. Each chronologically successive, yet ideologically interconnected stage in MacDiarmid's poetic evolution communicates the dualistic ambiguity of his engagement with the Enlightenment while being complicatedly combined in his radical Scottish Republican politics of place. Many of the theoretical splits in modern Scottish cultural politics are contained in MacDiarmid's debate with himself and the land of his birth, his attempt to see Scotland whole.

There will be two sections in this chapter, 'Scotland' and 'The Scottish Borders', each a debatable land. The chapter begins by examining how Scottish identity is constructed in and through MacDiarmid's work. It will look at this identity and the politics it gives rise to in the light of the principal cultural debates concerning Scottish identity, prioritizing recent postcolonial and marxist views of the imperial dualisms of the Enlightenment. It will end by tracing MacDiarmid's political radicalism to the debatable land of his Border birthplace in Langholm.

[4] In conversation with the present author, Edinburgh, 27 October 2000.

Scotland

MacDiarmid's writing career was a committed act of engagement and identification with the land of his birth. In 'Scotland' he tells us:

> So I have gathered unto myself
> All the loose ends of Scotland,
> And by naming them and accepting them,
> Loving them and identifying myself with them,
> Attempt to express the whole.[5]

In 'Dìreadh 1' he names Scotland as his Muse, 'the very object of my song / – This marvellous land of Scotland'.[6] Each of the three poems in the 'Dìreadh' sequence treats of the country (perhaps more precisely the countryside rather than anything that we could call the nation as a whole) in a similarly high literary and eulogistic vein. On addressing his hero Dostoevsky in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, the poet claims that 'a' that's Scottish is in me / As a' things Russian were in thee' and at the end of the poem he learns that, like Christ, the Scottish poet must die to redeem his people from the '*livin' tomb*' of their philistine individual lives and failed collective history.[7] That the drunk man-poet dies in order that the Scots may be reborn is not only Christ-like but reminiscent of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) in which the self-sacrifice of the Dionysian creative hero allows the collectivity to live in Apollonian order.[8]

Suggestive of MacDiarmid's personal martyr complex, such intimate and consciously chosen creative connection with nationality also illustrates what Robert Crawford calls the identifying poet: 'twentieth-century poets [who] construct for themselves an identity which allows them to identify with or to be identified with a

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[5] *CP1*, p. 652 ('Scotland').
[6] *CP2*, p. 1168 ('Dìreadh I').
[7] *CP1*, p. 165 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner (London: Penguin, 1993; 1872).

particular territory'.[9] In 'Conception', one of a number of poems to paintings by fellow Borderer William Johnstone – a Scottish Renaissance artist like MacDiarmid who, according to Murdo Macdonald, also 'explores evolutionary processes' – the artist gives birth to a new idea of Scotland that is at one with his own identity:

> So that indeed I could not be myself
> Without this strange, mysterious, awful finding
> Of my people's very life within my own
> – This terrible blinding discovery
> Of Scotland in me, and I in Scotland[10]

The close correspondence between the construction of modern Scottish political and cultural identity and MacDiarmid's often rather hubristic attitude to his own work is highlighted in 'The Difference':

> The difference between MacCormick and his friends and I
> Is this – that they
> Constitute the National Party of Scotland,
> I am Scotland itself to-day.
> They have dared to stake less than the highest
> In Scotland's name.
> Scotland will shine like the sun in my song
> While they vanish, like mists, whence they came.[11]

The 'difference' between the cultural creator MacDiarmid and politicians like MacCormick is that, while the latter seek to democratically represent the nation, the absolutist poet *is* Scotland. For MacDiarmid, Scottish culture is synchronous with (his own) Scottish identity.

Written in 1933, the poem coincides with MacDiarmid's expulsion from the National Party of Scotland in the spring of that year 'on the grounds of his Communist sympathies':

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[9] Robert Crawford, *Identifying Poets: Self and Territory in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 1.
[10] Murdo Macdonald, *Scottish Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), p. 181; *CP2*, p. 1070 ('Conception').
[11] *CP2*, p. 1277 ('The Difference').

> On the 19 May MacDiarmid received a letter from John MacCormick explaining that the NPS had no room for extremists. Party policy was to present a moderate front to the Scottish people by getting rid of men like MacDiarmid and merging (which it duly did in April of the following year) with the right-wing Scottish Party.[12]

MacCormick had been one of the founders of the NPS with MacDiarmid in 1928 and subsequently became Secretary of the party. MacDiarmid's contempt for the politician's moderate ideological stance – he became a Liberal in the 1940s – is echoed in MacCormick's disapproval of what he believed to be the poet's contradictory political extremism, 'which could encompass within one mind the doctrines of both Major Douglas and Karl Marx'.[13]

MacDiarmid's feelings about his expulsion from the NPS are made clear in a letter he wrote to Neil Gunn from Whalsay:

> I have just had a final communication from that nitwit, MacCormick, intimating that the National Party Council have [*sic*] resolved to exclude me from membership. Much good it may do them. It can do me no harm. I feel regarding them as a man may feel about a troupe of gibbering lunatics; and, of course, they feel the same about me – and I don't care which is right.[14]

MacDiarmid confirmed MacCormick's suspicions of his extremism by joining the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in the summer of 1934. The conflict between MacDiarmid and MacCormick illustrates the often uneasy relationship that has long existed between culture and politics in their battle for the soul of the nation. For the MacDiarmid of 'The Difference' it is culture that will represent more truly and lastingly the nation it helps to model, not the transient politicians who fight to control the state of the nation.

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[12] Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 289.
[13] John MacCormick, *The Flag in the Wind: The Story of the National Movement in Scotland* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1955), p. 35.
[14] *L*, p. 250 (to Neil M. Gunn, 19 May 1933).

Recent postcolonial criticism, and the 'invention of tradition' theory emanating from Hobsbawm and Ranger's book of that name in 1983, has emphasized the creative nature of nation building.[15] As Timothy Brennan points out, 'Nations [...] are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role'.[16] Brennan agrees with Benedict Anderson's seminal and oft-cited *Imagined Communities* (1983) that the capitalist advance of the novel and newsprint acted as a solidifying force in the construction of a national territory:

> the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.[17]

Tom Nairn opens his *Faces of Nationalism* (1997) with reference to a remark by his guru of nationalism theory Ernest Gellner 'that the true subject of all modern philosophy is industrialisation'.[18] Nairn suggests that Gellner is correct to argue that the herald of modernity was indeed industrialization, but that in fact 'the true subject of modern philosophy might be, not industrialisation as such, but its immensely complex and variegated aftershock – nationalism'.[19]

Nairn has long claimed that it is uneven economic development, created by the global race to industialize, which is the major cause of nationalism. However, in Scotland a political union that joined the nation to the first great industrial power and brought economic access to the world's richest empire complicated this. As such, the middle class, the engine of nationalism in other nineteenth-century European

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[15] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[16] Timothy Brennan, 'The national longing for form', *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 49.
[17] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1991; 1983), p. 46.
[18] Tom Nairn, *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited* (London & New York: Verso, 1997), p. 1.
[19] Nairn, *Faces of Nationalism*, p. 1.

countries, had no financial imperative to break its Enlightenment attachment to the metropolitan universalism of London and recreate Scottish statehood. For the marxist Nairn of *The Break-Up of Britain* (1977) this has had problematic repercussions for Scottish identity:

> Over-concentration upon cultural factors (especially literature) can lead easily to an over-subjective or idealist diagnosis of the country's modern situation. This is regularly found in the annals of nationalism. It must not be forgotten that Scotland's anomalous split personality was rendered possible – and in a sense justified by – its place in a larger framework. This is what that 'paradoxical form of Scottish self-determination' Grieve-MacDiarmid referred to was really about.[20]

Nairn claims that nationalist intellectuals stake too much on identity markers drawn from literary sources, yet 'Old and New Scottish Nationalism' continually engages with MacDiarmid, the chapter beginning with a quote from the poet's 'Albyn: or Scotland and the Future' from 1927. The 'paradoxical form of Scottish self-determination' is the 'absence of Scottish nationalism'.[21]

His insistence that post-Union Scotland is psychically sick, 'a sort of lunatic or deviant, in relation to normal development in the period in question', illustrates Nairn's reliance on MacDiarmid's conception of Scottish identity.[22] Metropolitan nations such as England represent 'normal development' in the nineteenth century and as Cairns Craig argues, compared to the cultural and political universalizing impulse of such economic dominance, Scotland could only appear to be fragmented and lacking in the supposed necessary cultural continuity to form a coherent tradition.[23] Nairn casts 'Grieve-MacDiarmid' as the psychologically split symbol of Scotland's identity crisis. For the MacDiarmid of 'Albyn':

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[20] Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 164.
[21] *A*, p. 19 ('Albyn: or Scotland and the Future').
[22] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, p. 164.
[23] See Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), pp. 11-30.

> Scotland is suffering from a very widespread inferiority complex – the result of the psychological violence suffered as a consequence of John Knox's anti-national policy in imposing an English Bible (and, as a consequence English as the basis of education) upon it, and of the means by which the Union of the Parliaments was encompassed and by which its inherent intention of completely assimilating Scotland to England has since been pursued. Weaker minds find compensation in a 'romantic nationalism' – sedulously dissociated from politics and practical realities of every kind. The others accept the situation and transcend it [...] But these – or some of them – are only exceptions that prove the rule that the Anglo-Scottish symbiosis leads to nullity.[24]

The idea of a split Scottish identity is employed in G. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919), a book that was particularly fruitful for MacDiarmid in its delineation of the essential Scot. Smith's Caledonian antisyzygy, a 'combination of opposites' or duality of the self – 'two moods' in the national literature of fantasy and reality – productive of great creative energy, seems unlikely to strike us now as peculiarly Scottish, despite the presence in the national literature of such obvious exemplifications of the idea as James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).[25] According to Smith, the Caledonian antisyzygy is an apt ideational expression of the dichotomous nature of Scottish identity and cultural experience:

> we have a reflection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability, which is another way of saying that he has made allowance for new conditions, in his practical judgement, which is his admission that two sides of the matter have been considered.[26]

As Robert Crawford points out, the Caledonian antisyzygy has 'become something of a cliché' in Scotland:

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[24] *A*, p. 6 ('Albyn: or Scotland and the Future').
[25] G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*, Ch. 1: 'Two Moods', p. 4.
[26] Ibid., p. 4.

> The standard thing to do with a Scottish writer is to show how he (or, very occasionally, she) corresponds to the well-established pattern of the Caledonian Antisyzygy. This model has been useful, but constricting. It is surely a measure of the theoretical poverty of much Scottish literary criticism that it has remained for most of the twentieth century the sole major interpretative model of the Scottish writer, and of Scottish Culture as a whole.[27]

Yet for MacDiarmid, Smith's essentialism was a valuable tool that enabled him to read the present as a degenerative phase caused by pernicious anglicization. If only Scotland could find its true radically republican, internationalist voice again the historical fractures of the past and the personal psychological splits of the present could be made whole.

MacDiarmid's *Scottish Eccentrics* (1936) is a book-length exemplification of the Caledonian antisyzygy. Here he contends that the dualistic identity of 'almost every distinguished Scot' is made up of 'extraordinary contradictions of character, most dangerous antinomies and antithetical impulses'.[28] However, through Union with England this older, more distinguished Scottish type is in danger of being lost, to be replaced by the canny Scot. Writing in 1931, MacDiarmid dismisses the canny Scot as a cultural stereotype fostered by the English in order to further political control:

> The contention is that the Union with England and other factors have favoured the wrong type of Scotland and promulgated on that basis – to the detriment and practical elimination of the finer elements of our race – a false and unworthy myth. [...] The 'false myth' of the canny Scot, with its subsidiaries, the mean Aberdonian and the egregious highlander of the Clans MacSporran and Macspurtle[29]

In *Scottish Eccentrics,* MacDiarmid sees the character of the post-Union Scot as having 'undergone a very remarkable change' that, like the anti-nationalist form of Scottish self-determination, 'may itself be only another exemplification of this

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[27] Crawford, *Identifying Poets*, p. 42.
[28] *SE*, p. 284 ('The Caledonian Antisyzygy').
[29] *RT2*, pp. 269, 271 ('Whither Scotland?').

peculiar working of our national genius' for a contrariness at odds with the image of the canny Scot.[30] The stereotypical Scots of the United Kingdom, encapsulated in the canny Scot myth, 'are regarded for the most part as a very dour, hard-headed, hard-working, tenacious people, devoted to the practical things of life and making no contribution to the more dazzling or debatable spheres of human genius'.[31] For the MacDiarmid of *Lucky Poet* (1943), this post-Union, monochromatic Scottish individuality is mirrored in the drab empiricism of the nation's presiding philosophy: 'Scotland's most pressing problem is undoubtedly the continued sway (in the head, if not on the lips) of the Common Sense Philosophy.'[32] MacDiarmid seeks the replacement of this culturally and politically disabling fallacy of the canny, pragmatic Anglo-Scot encouraged by Enlightenment metropolitanism with his own Celtic myth of the massively erudite and disinterested, divinely inebriated Scoto-Gaelic poet.

The 'clichéd image of the "canny Scot"', as Alan Riach points out, is a form of music hall 'tartan mockery' successfully incarnated in MacDiarmid's *bête noir* Harry Lauder.[33] MacDiarmid mentions Lauder often in his work, believing him to have 'played England's game and held Scotland up / To ridicule wherever you've gone'.[34] MacDiarmid's difficulty with Lauder is twofold. Firstly, the cultural image that Lauder presented of Scotland to the world was so hopelessly reactionary that it compounded the political provincialization of the Scots and effectively denationalized them:

> The reason why the Harry Lauder type of thing is so popular in England is because it corresponds to the average Englishman's ignorant notion of what the Scot is – or because it gives him a feeling of superiority which he is glad to indulge on any grounds, justified or otherwise. 'Lauderism' has made thousands of Scotsmen so disgusted with their national characteristics that they have gone to the opposite extreme and become, or tried to become, as

[30] *SE*, p. 284.
[31] *SE*, p. 285.
[32] *LP*, p. 387.
[33] Alan Riach , 'Survival Arts', *SE*, p. 324.
[34] *CP2*, p. 1287 ('Sir Harry Lauder').

> English as possible; 'Lauderism' is, of course, only the extreme form of those qualities of canniness, pawkieness and religiosity, which have been foisted upon the Scottish people by insidious English propaganda, as a means of destroying Scottish national pride, and of robbing Scots of their true attributes which are the very opposite of these mentioned. It is high time Scots were becoming alive to the ulterior effect of this propaganda by ridicule.[35]

For MacDiarmid, Lauder is a Scottish Uncle Tom contributing to English nationalism's cultural and political domination of Scotland. MacDiarmid thought of Lauder as a Scottish stereotype, harmful to the nation's sense of itself. For Robert Crawford, MacDiarmid was often no better in this regard than the man he so despised, corresponding 'at various times to the easiest Scottish stereotypes: the boasting predatory male, the political motor-mouth, the pickled poet'.[36] MacDiarmid jealously hates Lauder because the entertainer has become what the poet wants to be, the voice of Scotland. Only, for this identifying Scottish nationalist poet searching for the essential, metaphysical Scot, Lauder is the false voice of a degraded nation: 'The problems o' the Scottish soul / Are nocht to Harry Lauder'.[37]

Secondly, Lauder was remarkably popular and rich. According to Lauder's biographer Gordon Irving, 'When he did a broadcast at Christmas in 1925, he was given the highest fee ever paid at that time by the British Broadcasting Corporation. It was in the region of £1,500.'[38] Lauder's is a true rags-to-riches story, from a small house in Portobello, where he was born in 1870 and where his father worked as a potter, to friendship with Andrew Carnegie and Charlie Chaplin and knighthood in 1919. MacDiarmid's beginnings were similarly modest, but he was never to receive the plaudits that Lauder won and worked in a field which, as a self-proclaimed highbrow, he considered to be infinitely more important to the national culture:

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[35] *RT2*, p. 114 ('Scottish People and "Scotch Comedians"').
[36] Crawford, *Identifying Poets*, p. 45.
[37] *CP1*, p. 248 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[38] Gordon Irving, *Great Scot! The Life Story of Sir Harry Lauder, Legendary Laird of the Music Hall* (London: Leslie Frewin, 1968), p. 123.

> The fact that this over-paid clown gets £1,500 a week is a shameful commentary on the low state of public taste. It represents a salary which, divided up into good reasonable sums, would provide for 150 intellectual workers yearly amounts of £500 each. £500 a year is considerably more than the average that has been earned by any of the writers, artists, or musicians of whom Scotland has any right to be proud during the past 200 years. One of the finest of modern Scots, John Davidson, commits suicide because he cannot stand any longer the daily humiliations to which he is exposed through his inability to lower himself successfully to cater for the mass; Harry Lauder – who has done nothing worth doing and is not fit to blacken Davidson's boots – earns £1,500 a week, a 150th part of which would have kept Davidson in comfort and enabled him to add work of permanent value to the world of letters. Burns, towards the end, is sore depressed for £5. But Harry Lauder earns every week more than double all Burns received for his immortal poems – and has the indecency to take it and think he is worth it.[39]

In writing about Davidson – 'the best Scot for a century / Dee'd while fower million fools lived on' – and Burns, poets he considered to be true Scots unlike the rich Lauder, MacDiarmid is thinking of himself, working hard as a journalist in Montrose and writing poetry and propaganda towards a new radical Scotland when this article was penned in 1928.[40]

Lauder not only thought he was worth the money he earned, he propagandized for the system from which he benefited so handsomely and to which the communist MacDiarmid is opposed. In an article in the *Democrat*, which proclaimed above the title of its hundredth issue 'We are out to fight the policy of red revolution', Lauder tells us 'how money is made':

> We are beginning to realise that we cannot get something for nothing; that work is the cure for most wrongs – good, honest work for an honest and fair wage. Money is only made by those who control it, keep it, and put it to its proper use. A man who never tries to save and never tries to put his money to its best advantage will never make any and never deserve to: hence the reason that Communism will never be a practicable thing. We are none of us alike; some work and some don't and never will. I myself have never been a 'ca' cannyist'. I have worked my hardest all my life, and I don't regret a

[39] *RT2*, pp. 114-15 ('Scottish People and "Scotch Comedians"').
[40] *CP2*, p. 1454 ('John Davidson').

> single day spent. Communism would mean the absolute negation of the principle of self-help, and, moreover, of human nature.[41]

Irving tells us that after some bad contractual experiences in London, Lauder 'made up his mind that he would never again see other artistes on the same bill earning more money than himself'.[42] For the MacDiarmid of 'Ode to All Rebels'

> Ilka man that blethers o' honest toil,
> And believes in rewards and punishments,
> In a God like Public Opinion,
> And the sanctity o' the financial system

is a 'devil' and the task of the rebel 'is to destroy them a''.[43] In attempting to destroy Lauder, MacDiarmid is aiming his polemical guns at the most famous Scot of the day and the false, capitalist Anglo-Scotland that he cannily represents.

For MacDiarmid, the travesty that is the canny Scot stereotype is dangerous because it immobilizes Scottish identity within politically controllable colonial confines. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha sees such stereotyping as an integral part of the discourse of colonialism: 'An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness.'[44] By parading before us 'the strange procession' of heterogeneous Scottishness collected in *Scottish Eccentrics*, MacDiarmid is attempting to break that 'fixity' and allow a much more fluid idea of national identity. However, his eccentrics, notable failures like William McGonagall and Christopher North, seem merely to be the dualistic flip-side of the stereotypical snobbish superiorism of the English or the eminently empirical and imperial Brit. Indeed, MacDiarmid's book follows on from Edith Sitwell's *English Eccentrics* (1933).

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[41] Harry Lauder, 'How Money is Made: Sir Harry Lauder and Cure for "Ca Canny"', *Montrose Standard*, 18 March 1921, p. 6; first appeared in the *Democrat*.
[42] Irving, *Great Scot!*, p. 137.
[43] *CP1*, pp. 507, 508 ('Ode to All Rebels').
[44] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995; 1994), p. 66.

MacDiarmid's masculinist conception of the nation also perpetuates stereotypes: there is, for example, only one woman in *Scottish Eccentrics*, Elspeth Buchan, an eighteenth-century religionist. MacDiarmid's analysis of the character of Scottish women tends to reinforce the canny Scot myth he is attempting to break. He contends that they 'have perhaps played a greater part, influenced the activities of the men to a greater extent, than the women of any other European nation':

> Can the absence in modern Scotland of all the rare and higher qualities of the human spirit be attributed to this undue influence of the female sex? It may have something to do with it. It is, at all events, worth recalling that Galton in his study of genius maintains that it seldom comes where the mother's influence is strongest. Scotswomen are overwhelmingly not the sort to be 'fashed with the nonsense' of any attention to the arts, or other precarious and comparatively unremunerative activities on the part of their offspring, as against due concentration on the business of getting on and doing well in a solid material sense.[45]

The idea that civilization is weakened by female influence has an ignoble record in the history of ideas, reaching its misogynistic pinnacle in the work of Nietzsche, by whom MacDiarmid was influenced through A.R. Orage. Riach suggests, 'Far from implying misogyny, a close reading might demonstrate MacDiarmid's complicity in feminist theories about the social construction of sexual identity.'[46] However, given that MacDiarmid's whole body of work may be seen as an attempt to re-masculinize a Scotland that has been feminized by its role as the weaker partner of the Union, this contention is difficult to support. The problem with MacDiarmid's conception of identity, whether female or national, is that in its reliance on the antisyzygy trope it centres the dualism of colonial discourse within the very subject that is seeking to escape this paralysing schism.

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[45] *SE*, pp. 160-1.
[46] Alan Riach, 'Survival Arts', *SE*, p. 334.

A psychological analysis of Scotland's political and cultural ills that places the sickness within the will-less Scottish subject is one of the main themes of *A Drunk Man*:

> *This* Freudian complex has somehow slunken
> Frae Scotland's soul – the Scots aboulia –
> Whilst a' its *terra nullius* is *betrunken.*
>
> And a' the country roon' aboot it noo
> Lies clapt and shrunken[47]

The marxist Nairn of *The Break-Up of Britain* uses this psychological model inherited from MacDiarmid, while the nationalists Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull in *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* (1989) use the doctor and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) as a basis for their examination of cultural imperialism and colonial identity in a fissured and failed Scottish culture.[48] The drunk man affirms a Nietzschean will to power that will break 'the Scots aboulia', metaphysically transcending the personal, self-hating schisms and cultural waste land of a politically provincialized nation through a linguistic localism and spiritual evolutionism that seeks the essentially whole pre-Union Scot.

MacDiarmid's essentialism emanates in part from his own religious, psychological and creative needs which, in a megalomaniacal manner, he projects on to *his* nation. However, the nationalist poet also wishes to make whole in the present a problematical inheritance from the past: the political and cultural fissures of the Union and the Anglophone Scottish Enlightenment. Such are illustrated by the metropolitan Dr Johnson – whose Dictionary (1755) contributes to the process of British linguistic standardization – on a visit to Enlightenment Edinburgh in 1773:

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[47] *CP1*, p. 93 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[48] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, preface Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1990; 1961).

> The conversation of the *Scots* grows every day less unpleasing to the *English*; their peculiarities wear fast away; their dialect is likely to become in half a century provincial and rustick, even to themselves. The great, the learned, the ambitious, and the vain, all cultivate the *English* phrase, and the *English* pronunciation, and in splendid companies Scotch is not much heard, except now and then from an old Lady.[49]

MacDiarmid attempts to surmount such ruptures in tradition by writing a Scots poetry that seeks to re-establish a distinctly Scottish national voice. His search for the metaphysical Scot in Montrose in the 1920s denies the Anglo-Scottish element of Scottish identity through the organicist essentialism of a totalizing project that attempts to uncover the real Scotland. Writing 'Towards a Scottish Renaissance' in 1929, MacDiarmid proposes that we

> take a typical Anglo-Scot, opposed to Nationalism, ignorant of Scots and still more of Gaelic, and carefully catalogue all that he takes for granted as reasonable, natural, and inevitable in any connection – and repudiate the lot, and take up the very opposite positions.[50]

From a postcolonial theoretical perspective, such organicist repudiation of alterity, the striving after cultural and political unity, is the theoretical armoury for the very political and cultural imperialism that MacDiarmid is seeking to counter. By portraying Scottish cultural identity since the Union as dualistically fractured and failed, through acceptance of Smith's dichotomous antisyzygy as the essence of the true Scot, MacDiarmid mirrors metropolitan culture's deliberately distorted vision of its Other, the peripheral or marginal culture. Organicist essentialism helps keeps the Enlightenment imperial dualism of centre and margin alive and is ultimately, therefore, a self-defeating theory for the marginalized culture to embrace.

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[49] Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), in Johnson & Boswell, *Journey to the Hebrides*, ed. and intro. Ian McGowan (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 2001; 1996), p. 143.

[50] *RT2*, p. 80 ('Towards a Scottish Renaissance: desirable lines of advance').

One way around this problem is to accept the culture of a larger imperial nation and attempt to subsume one's work within this metropolitan tradition. This is the route taken by Edwin Muir in *Scott and Scotland* (1936), a book that charts 'the predicament of the Scottish writer' in a post-Union Scotland. For Muir, Scottish literature could not offer a unified tradition because Scots no longer felt and expressed themselves in the same language. This means that both the personal psychology and the national culture of the Scot is fractured by the historical ruptures of the past:

> The reasons for this disintegration of the language of Scottish literature are controversial, and I have no space to enter into them here. But it is clear that the Reformation, the Union of the Crowns, and the Union of the Kingdoms had all a great deal to do with it. I must confine myself, however, to certain of its consequences. The prerequisite of an autonomous literature is a homogeneous language.[51]

The different linguistic registers on offer to the Scot – Gaelic, Scots, English (and the many languages of immigrants to Scotland in the twentieth century that Muir omits to mention) – mean that the 'highest spiritual energy of a people' is dissipated in various linguistic channels, disabling the culture and the Scottish writer from expressing a whole self: 'The curse of Scottish literature is the lack of a whole language, which finally means the lack of a whole mind.'[52]

For Muir, the reason that Walter Scott did not achieve the first rank of greatness that his talents and prodigious energy deserved is that his work issued from

> a country, that is to say, which was neither a nation nor a province, and had, instead of a centre, a blank, an Edinburgh, in the middle of it. But this Nothing in which Scott wrote was not merely a spatial one; it was a temporal Nothing as well, dotted with a few disconnected figures arranged at abrupt intervals: Henryson, Dunbar, Allan Ramsay, Burns, with a rude buttress of ballads and folk songs to shore them up and keep them from falling. Scott, in other words, lived in a community which was not

[51] Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer*, intro. Allan Massie (Edinburgh: Polygon 1982; 1936), p. 7.
[52] Muir, *Scott and Scotland*, pp. 7, 9.

> community, and set himself to carry on a tradition which was not a tradition[53]

The dualities of Scott's work, its historical fantasticalness that yet appealed to the realist materialism of the marxist Georg Lukacs, derive from an Enlightenment Edinburgh that has rendered a distinctly Scottish tradition 'blank', a cultural 'Nothing' – what MacDiarmid calls 'sic a Blottie O' – issuing in what Marinell Ash believes to be 'an historical failure of nerve' in the nineteenth century. [54] However, as Robert Crawford has shown, Scott was concerned with the delineation of a new enlightened British identity and the important part Scotland had to play in its construction. In doing so, 'linguistic and cultural eclecticism' was certainly not the handicap that Muir sees it as, but an integral part of Scott's work.[55] Scottish traditions were to be preserved within a British framework and Scott would act as a cultural broker of this Union:

> Scott's compositional strategies challenged an audience used to thinking of itself as monocultural and monolingual. Though he played his part in the northward movement of the Romantic imagination away from metropolitan London, this anthropological, linguistically daring multiculturalism was his greatest achievement. He sought a devolution of sensibility.[56]

MacDiarmid and Muir, friends in the 1920s when MacDiarmid was living in provincial Montrose attempting to fashion an internationalist Scotland, were to fall out over Muir's view of Scottish culture and language as expressed in *Scott and Scotland.* Yet as Cairns Craig argues, in some respects their ideas as to 'the predicament of the Scottish writer' are very much alike. For Craig, peripheral cultures such as Scotland

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[53] Muir, *Scott and Scotland,* pp. 2-3.
[54] *CP1,* p. 115 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*); Marinell Ash, *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (Edinburgh: The Ramsey Head Press, 1980), p. 10.
[55] Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 133.
[56] Ibid.

often oppose their political marginalization by attempting to bury the organicist notion of tradition that highlights, indeed implements, their cultural fragmentariness:

> This was in part the route taken by Muir's embittered antagonist of the 1930s, Hugh MacDiarmid, when he demanded 'precedents not traditions' in fulfilment of his battlecry of 'not Burns – Dunbar!' Such a policy, however, amounts to a kind of cultural 'scorched earth' tactic, obliterating everything belonging to the actual, historical development of the culture in order to get back to a pure origin. The best that it can produce is a few major figures who represent possible precedents; what it cannot produce is a sense of our present relationship with the past. To foreground precedents rather than traditions subjects the national past no less to the kinds of erasures that follow from Muir's views. However opposed Muir and MacDiarmid were, their conceptions of the actual development of Scottish culture were deeply similar, and equally negative.[57]

MacDiarmid's rejection of Muir's Anglo-centred tradition of commercially canonical figures is expressed in the Gaelic Idea of *To Circumjack Cencrastus*:

> *I asked him if he'd heard*
> *Of Burns or Sir Walter Scott,*
> *Of Carlyle or R.L.S.*
> *He said that he had not.*
> *'Some people think that these*
> *Are representative ... I don't.*
> *At least, you've little to forget,*
> *And should assimilate with ease,*
> *From that false Scotland free,*
> *All that's worth knowing yet.'* [58]

Craig fails to see the Scottish Renaissance movement of the twenties that both MacDiarmid and Muir so strongly contributed to, and MacDiarmid's uncovering of the hidden tradition of radical Scottish Republicanism from the 1930s onwards, as constituting replacement traditions for a periphery under pressure. For Craig, such negative conceptions of the national culture's past and present as conveyed by '*false*

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[57] Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 22.
[58] *CP1*, p. 208 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).

Scotland', constructed by a radically individual writer of strong modernist ego like MacDiarmid, make it difficult to build a politically independent future:

> There may be a certain freedom for the individual writer in this liberation from tradition – and MacDiarmid exploited the freedom he gave himself to reinvent Scotland in his own image – but in the end its consequences for the nation's sense of itself can only be destructive.[59]

What is clear from the MacDiarmid-Muir conflict is that whenever a fissure appears in the debatable land of Scottish cultural politics – an argument between writers in different ideological or aesthetic camps, or a broader historical change such as the Reformation or the Enlightenment, for instance – the validity of the entire national culture is called into question, 'the failure of Scottish culture to *be* whole':

> The 'predicament' of the imagination in Scotland is that it is neither a real imagination – having been maimed by Calvinism – nor is it effectively national – since Scotland has failed to maintain a continuous identity as a nation of the modern kind.[60]

This failure to achieve a unified identity in personal, cultural, political and metaphysical terms in modern Scotland is the subject of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, a work which Tom Nairn has described as 'that great national poem on the impossibility of nationalism'.[61] Published in 1926, this modernist poem is the culmination of MacDiarmid's experience of the First World War and the reading, thinking and writing that began 'Somewhere in Macedonia', from where he intended to return and 'enter heart and body and soul into a new Scots Nationalist propaganda'.[62] MacDiarmid's thinking at this time of war had turned towards Neo-Catholicism, about which he wrote essays on 'Neo-Catholicism's debt to Sir Walter

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[59] Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 22.
[60] Ibid., pp. 22, 21.
[61] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, p. 169.
[62] MacDiarmid, *The Hugh MacDiarmid – George Ogilvie Letters*, ed. Catherine Kerrigan (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), pp. 8, 13 (20 August 1916).

Scott' and 'The Indisserverable [*sic*] Association' between Scottish culture and Catholicism.[63] Even at this early stage – the letter to Ogilvie is dated 20 August 1916 – MacDiarmid is not only concerned with acquiring Scottish cultural omnipotence, but also with the idea of failure in the national culture:

> I have my 'The Scottish Vortex' (as per system exemplified in *Blast*), 'Caricature in Scotland – and lost opportunities', 'A Copy of Burns I want', (suggestions to illustrators on a personal visualization of the national pictures evoked in the poem), 'Scottish colour-thought' (a study of the aesthetic condition of Scottish nationality in the last three centuries) and 'The Alienation of Our Artistic Ability' (the factors which prevent the formation of a 'national' school and drive our artists to other lands and to foreign portrayal).[64]

The Scottish Renaissance group that MacDiarmid was to have such an influential part in promoting had many Catholic converts within its ranks such as Fionn Mac Colla, whose novel *The Albannach* (1932) and non-fictional work *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (1967) castigate the cultural blight of Scotland's Knoxian heritage and who converted in 1935, and Compton Mackenzie who converted in 1914 and whose novel *Sinister Street* (1913) climaxes with the hero Michael Fane coming to the faith: 'Rome! Rome! How parochial you make my youth.'[65] The self-proclaimed atheist MacDiarmid never converted to Catholicism, but many of his earlier ideas accord with what William Storrar calls 'the parrot cries of the Scottish *literati* about the continuing blight of Calvinism on the nation's psyche':

> I assert without fear of contradiction that the general type of consciousness which exists in Scotland today – call it Calvinistic or what you will (it has, at any rate, been largely coloured and determined by the unique and peculiarly unfortunate form the Reformation took in Scotland) – is anti-aesthetic to an appalling degree, and none the less so because it is, *ipso facto*, constitutionally unconscious of its disability, and naively disposed to set up its own gross limitations as indispensable criteria. I make no apology

[63] MacDiarmid, *The Hugh MacDiarmid – George Ogilvie Letters*, pp. 8-9 (20 August 1916).
[64] Ibid., p. 9.
[65] Compton Mackenzie, *Sinister Street* (London: MacDonald, 1949; 1913), p. 880.

> for my central position that no amount of theology or morality can compensate for the lack of active creative perceptiveness in a people.[66]

The drunk man laments the cultural influence of Calvinism in almost pathological terms, suggesting a disease particular to the artist that has communal side effects:

> *O fitly frae oor cancerous soil*
> *May this heraldic horror rise!*
> *The Presbyterian thistle flourishes,*
> *And its ain roses crucifies...*[67]

However, the theoretical MacDiarmid of the Scottish Renaissance, aiming to unify Scotland against political and cultural provincialization, is also aware that

> It will not do to identify Scottish nationality and traditions wholly with Protestantism. There has always been a considerable native Catholic population, and most of the finest elements in our traditions, in our literature, in our national history, come down from the days when Scotland was wholly Catholic.[68]

By emphasizing the cultural bountifulness of Scotland's pre-Reformation, Catholic past MacDiarmid is attempting to counter the influence of Protestantism in dynastically and politically uniting the nations of the United Kingdom and so undermine its power to continue to do so in the present. When Linda Colley asks, 'Who were the British, and did they even exist?' the answer she supplies is emphatic: 'Protestantism was the foundation that made the invention of Great Britain possible.'[69] Similarly, of the metropolitan, Anglophone Scottish Enlightenment, Alexander Broadie says, 'Moderate Protestantism was the Enlightenment baptised.'[70] For

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[66] William Storrar, *Scottish Identity: A Christian Vision* (Edinburgh: The Handsell Press, 1990), pp. 53-4; *RT2*, p. 55 ('The Conventional Scot and the Creative Spirit').
[67] *CP1*, p. 152 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[68] *A*, p. 29 ('Albyn: or Scotland and the Future').
[69] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 1996; 1992), p. 58.
[70] Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), p. 49.

MacDiarmid, looking to heal the ruptures of the past, these are good political and ideological reasons to exaggerate an attachment to Catholicism and correspondingly overestimate the cultural damage perpetrated by the religion of his birth.

The drunk man begins his metaphysical odyssey in search of the absolute by wrestling with Scottish Presbyterianism and its cultural consequences. In the process, he betrays his own Calvinist inheritance through his elect attitude to his fellow nationals and the national culture. The real Scotland has lost its spirit and has been buried underneath the dross of a fake tourist culture. Even Scotland's most famous export, whisky, has been watered down: 'the stuffie's no' the real Mackay'.[71] Whisky is a metaphor for the deplorable condition of a nation from which the essence has been stolen to benefit others, leaving Scotland 'destitute o' speerit'.[72] It is the drunk man's self-imposed task to expose this counterfeit culture in order 'To prove my saul is Scots'.[73] He will do so by treating of 'what's still deemed Scots and the folk expect', such as whisky and Robert Burns, before moving on to metaphysical 'heichts whereo' the fules ha'e never recked'.[74] For the drunk man searching for the essential nation and its worthy inhabitant, the metaphysical Scot, '*Sic transit gloria Scotiae*' – all the glories of pre-Reformation Scotland have passed away – to be replaced by the kailyard offerings of Presbyterian ministers and the canny music hall caricature of a Scot, 'Harry Lauder (to enthrall us)'.[75]

MacDiarmid's idea that the real Scotland is buried beneath the tawdry tartanry of a fake culture as represented by Lauder leads him to commit some stereotyping of his own:

> You canna gang to a Burns supper even
> Wi'oot some wizened scrunt o' a knock-knee

[71] *CP1*, p. 83 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] *CP1*, pp. 84, 164.

> Chinee turns roon to say, 'Him haggis – velly goot!'
> And ten to wan the piper is a Cockney.[76]

This sending-up of foreigners imitates the reactionary music hall style that MacDiarmid wishes to escape. In a letter to Pittendrigh MacGillivray, MacDiarmid tries to excuse such racism by blaming the drunk man's inebriated condition, something he attempts in the poem itself in order to justify unsatisfactory poetry:

> Awak', my muse, and gin you're in puir fettle,
> We aye can blame it on th' inferior drink.[77]

In the same letter to MacGillivray, MacDiarmid writes of future poetic plans:

> One of the projects exercising my mind is to dig down to my own rockbottom [*sic*] conclusions (not those of any hypothetical *Drunk Man*) in regard to a series of things – Scottish National issues (not opinions, but fundamental intuitions and convictions), organic apprehensions, the definition of the spiritual affirmities we have in common[78]

This relates to the prospective *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930). However, *A Drunk Man* is also illustrative of many of MacDiarmid's 'conclusions' on 'Scottish National issues' and 'the spiritual affirmities' of the Scots.

In *A Drunk Man* MacDiarmid feels impelled to represent Scotland because the nation is intrinsic to his identity. The drunk man's sense of self is compiled of 'a composite diagram o' / Cross-sections o' my forbears' organs' and although this elitist attempts in self-disgust to exorcize this haunting by his ancestors, 'yet like bindweed through my clay it's run'.[79] On examination of himself, the drunk man finds his innermost, spiritual identity to be irredeemably connected to a metaphysical Scotland:

> My ain soul looks me in the face, as 'twere,

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[76] *CP1*, p. 84 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[77] *CP1*, p. 94.
[78] *L*, p. 326 (to Pittendrigh Macgillivray, 28 September 1926).
[79] *CP1*, p. 93 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).

And mair than my ain soul – my nation's soul![80]

Similarly,

Scotland, responsive to my thoughts,
Lichts mile by mile, as my ain nerves,
Frae Maidenkirk to John o' Groats![81]

The drunk man, seeking a metaphysical nation made complete and undivided through the creative endeavours of the essential Scot, is bound body and soul to the whole of a fractured Scotland.

Yet in spite, or perhaps because, of the drunk man's close identification to his country, his attitude to his fellow nationals is disdainful. MacDiarmid often behaved in a similar way in his public pronouncements on other famous Scots, such as Burns and Lauder, for instance. If he is Scotland then he must oust anyone else who may have a claim to national precedence in order to clear the way for his own vision of the nation. The absolutist MacDiarmid in pursuit of a metaphysical Scotland creates a cultural vacuum – not the so-called fractures of the nation's past – through his idea of a failed Scotland that he can then fill with his saviour-like presence. MacDiarmid's elitism will be examined more fully in Chapter Five of this thesis in relation to the masses and capitalist culture. However, with reference to the Calvinist inheritance of Scottish culture, the visionary drunk man sees himself as elect in comparison with the majority of Scots, such as his spiritually unenlightened drinking companions Cruivie and Gilsanquhar.

J.K.S. Reid, in his Introduction to Calvin's *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* reminds us that

[80] *CP1*, p. 93 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[81] *CP1*, p. 108.

> Calvin affirms that there is clearly a difference of condition amongst those who have a common nature. In the darkness common to all, some are illumined, while others remain blind. The question Calvin raises is how this differentiation comes about. His answer to the question is equally clear: we must confess that 'God, by His eternal goodwill, which has no cause outside itself, destined those whom He pleased to salvation, rejecting the rest; those whom He dignified by gratuitous adoption, He illumined by His spirit, so that they receive the life offered in Christ, while others voluntarily disbelieve, so that they remain in darkness destitute of the light of faith'.[82]

In a metaphysical poem soaked with references to Christ and Calvary, the visionary drunk man is clearly in thrall to his Presbyterian formation. Combined with a sense of elect superiority, this leaves the drunk man somewhat at odds with his Scottish environment and its myth of Burnsian egalitarianism. Paradoxically, his elect elitism may be an attempt to dismember within himself the spiritual remnants of a Christianity inherited from his small-town Border childhood that bears resemblance to Burnsian socialism:

> O gin they'd stegh their guts and haud their wheesht
> I'd thole it, for 'a man's a man' I ken,
> But though the feck ha'e plenty o' 'a' that',
> They're nocht but zoologically men.[83]

David McCrone tells us that 'In the Scottish myth, the central motif is the inherent egalitarianism of the Scots'.[84] He proceeds to analyse Burns's poem 'For a' that and a' that' which

> seems to strip away the differences which are essentially social constructions. In spite of these (the 'a' that'), Burns is saying, people are equal. His meaning of equality is, however, ambiguous. He is calling not for a levelling down of riches, but for a proper, that is, moral appreciation of 'the man o' independent mind'. It is 'pith o' sense and pride o' worth' which matter, not the struttings and starings of 'yon birkie ca'd a lord'. The ambiguity of his message is retained to the last stanza – 'that man to man

[82] J.K.S. Reid, 'Editor's Introduction', John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (London: John Clarke, 1961), p. 11.
[83] *CP1*, p. 85 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[84] David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998; 1992), p. 90.

> the world o'er shall brothers be for a' that' – an appeal to the virtues of fraternity rather than equality in the strict sense.[85]

The 'ambiguity' of Burns's poem is mirrored in the paradoxical nature of Calvinism. On the one hand, it inculcates a spirit of equality in its adherents; on the other, it predestines some to salvation while damning the rest. MacDiarmid's sense of elect superiority, perhaps a psychological mechanism to compensate for an inferiority complex connected to his feelings about his self-repressed nation, would leave him impatient with the concept of fraternity. For W.N. Herbert, 'the antisyzygy which most fiercely powered' MacDiarmid's life and writing was 'love and revulsion for himself and his nation'.[86] If MacDiarmid is one of the elect then he is free to 'adopt a thorough antinomian attitude' towards 'all sorts of vibrantly commonplace people', in particular the bulk of post-Union Scots:

> To save your souls fu' mony o' ye are fain,
> But de'il a dizzen to mak' it worth the daen'.
> I widna gie five meenits wi' Dunbar
> For a' the millions o' ye as ye are.[87]

Alan Bold tells us that as a boy the poet 'was awarded several certificates for Bible knowledge' and that local minister and poet T.S. Cairncross was 'Arguably the greatest influence on Christopher Grieve's boyhood'.[88] Bold confirms that 'the intellectual elitism of MacDiarmid is an extension of the doctrine of the elect so crucial to the Calvinistic tradition of the Scottish kirk'.[89] MacDiarmid says of the religion of the Covenanters that 'It holds me in a fastness of security' implying that the 'waves of their purposefulness' give meaning to life, saving the adherents of extreme

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[85] McCrone, *Understanding Scotland*, p. 91.
[86] W.N. Herbert, *To Circumjack MacDiarmid: The Poetry and Prose of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 224-5.
[87] *LP*, p. 78; *CP1*, p. 107 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[88] Bold, *MacDiarmid*, pp. 34, 30.
[89] Ibid., p. 33.

Presbyterianism from metaphysical despair, but also suggesting that at the existential limits the atheist poet comes home to the religion of his childhood: 'In weather as black as the Bible / I return again to my kind'.[90] MacDiarmid was to leave behind that security of religious belief as he grew older. As the concluding section of this chapter illustrates, the spiritual evolutionism of a Calvinism inculcated in his Langholm boyhood informs the communist faith with which he replaced Presbyterianism. However, he never completely abandoned the frame of reference of Christianity, in particular the Calvinistic outrage at what he saw as a lack of spiritual growth in the majority and a concomitant feeling of elect superiority that he belonged to the few who have or can evolve spiritually:

> Aye, this is Calvary – to bear
> Your Cross wi'in you frae the seed,
> And feel it grow by slow degrees
> Until it rends your flesh apairt,
> And turn, and see your fellow-men
> In similar case but sufferin' less
> Thro' bein' mair wudden frae the stert!...[91]

Born a Calvinist, the drunk man spiritually comprehends the physical agony and metaphysical torment of the crucified Christ and knows that suffering is the lot of humanity. However, the elect modernist poet, infected with a double dose of elitism, believes himself to suffer more than ordinary Scots, particularly in a Calvinist culture that he considers, and perhaps helps render, artistically sterile.

One of the consequences of MacDiarmid's teleologism in its application to the national culture is the idea that the real Scotland is somehow hidden in the muck of materiality and can only be revealed when the country discovers its true spiritual destiny. Until it does so it will languish in cultural and political desolation, 'Scotland

[90] *CP1*, p. 551 ('The Covenanters'); p. 381 ('Envoi: On Coming Home').
[91] *CP1*, p. 134 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).

turn Eliot's waste – the Land o' Drouth'.[92] Addressing Dostoevsky, the drunk man states that God-bearers or '*Narodbogonosets* are my folk tae'.[93] (MacDiarmid's real Christian name, Christopher, means Christ-bearer.) However, the religion of his birth has fallen on hard times – 'the trade's nocht to what it was' – like the nation it once led.[94] MacDiarmid wittily suggests that 'Unnatural practices are the cause', understanding that the demise of religion can be attributed to changes in the sexual climate and material inventions such as contraception rather than the rationality of Enlightenment progress.[95] As such, 'baith bairns and God'll be obsolete / (The twaesome gang thegither)'.[96] If religion is 'the stane the builders rejec'' in the construction of modernity but is still 'the corner-stane' of human understanding of life then, despite the Calvinistic nullity they have made of the present culture, the God-bearers of Presbyterianism – Scotland's 'chosen people' – can ensure that 'Scotland sall find oot its destiny / And yield the *vse-chelovek*', literally the all-man or pan-human.[97]

Ideally, the spiritual evolution inherent in Calvinism will elicit, for the first time since the Greeks, a supremely independent yet whole person, Nietzsche's dream of transcending the human with a new over-man. Hence, the imperialistic goal of Scottish history, the historic mission of the nation, is to effect the unification of humanity through the East-West synthesis with Dostoevsky's Russia, producing through this combination of different national values a spiritually regenerated, truly enlightened human identity. Quoting Sir Richard Livingstone, MacDiarmid attempts a similar synthesis of East and West in 'Dìreadh III' of 'the Scots with the Chinese' – this being

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[92] *CP1*, p. 134 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] *CP1*, p. 134; see Clifford Longley, *Chosen People: The Big Idea That Shaped England and America* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003; 2002) for the influence of Protestantism on the imperialism of England and the United States.

'the best chance / Of reproducing the ancient Greek temperament' – the resultant effulgent Sun of *Republic* being born of a cultural amalgam that will combat what the poet sees as 'the perilous night of English stupidity'.[98] As with other modernists, MacDiarmid's dreams of human perfectibility savour unpleasantly of almost eugenist and racist solutions to the perceived political problems of modernity in order to return to the imagined cultural superiority of the classical Greek *polīteiā*. Concerned with the degeneration they believed to be implicit in modern democracy, some modernists were attracted to eugenics as a way 'to assume responsibility for a creation recently orphaned by God'.[99] MacDiarmid's cranky idea of selective national crossbreeding is an extreme example of an identifying politics of place that seeks to rid Scotland of the influence of the Saxon. Like the evolutionary eugenics of Woolf, Eliot and Yeats it is ultimately religious in its desire for an essential national identity.

With *To Circumjack Cencrastus* MacDiarmid continues the idea of his nation as spiritual reformer of the world, a place where 'the religious attitude has found / In Scotland yet a balancin' ground' that will see 'North, South, East, West nae mair opposed'.[100] An absolutist Scotland that he identifies absolutely with himself, the poet wants

> To see it frae the hamely and the earthly snatched
> And precipitated to what it will be in the end
> A' that's ephemeral shorn awa' and rhyme nae mair
> Mere politics, personalities, and mundane things[101]

In MacDiarmid's nationalist vision, a metaphysical Scotland, conjoined with Russia, will challenge the world supremacy and materialism of imperial Anglo-Saxondom.

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[98] *CP2*, p. 1190 ('Direadh III').
[99] Donald J. Childs, *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 4.
[100] *CP1*, p. 289 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[101] Ibid.

From nineteenth-century *Pax Britannica* to twenty-first-century *Pax Americana*: after 1930, the communist MacDiarmid opposes the totalitarian rationalizing project of the East – revolutions theoretically inflamed by the Enlightenment-inspired materialism of Marx – to the imperialistic Protestant liberal capitalism of the Saxon West, which also lays claim to Enlightenment foundations. MacDiarmid was fond of saying that the Scots, or rather the Gaels, were originally from Stalin's Georgia: 'We are Georgians all. / We Gaels'.[102] But the elision of terms through which the poet identifies himself performs a brand of cultural imperialism of its own: the Presbyterian Scottish Borderer becomes the pre-Union Catholic singer of Highland Gaeldom. As late as 1953, coronation of Saxe-Coburgian Elizabeth (purportedly the) II, MacDiarmid still thought of himself as 'The Man for whom Gaeldom is waiting', believing that 'Lowland Scotland is a battleground / Between Europe and Gaeldom'.[103] MacDiarmid's Calvinism wants everything 'that's ephemeral shorn awa'' from Scotland including, it seems, his own cultural origins and the actual development of the nation. Like many other Scottish artists, MacDiarmid liked to bemoan the cultural deleteriousness of Calvinism. However, his own 'religious attitude', which seeks the revelation of metaphysical reality beyond the ephemerality of material actuality, coupled with his Calvinistic credo of the elect, blights the Scottish culture of the present with the apparent failures of the past. Present in MacDiarmid is the reverse of the imperialistic Enlightenment duality written of by Murray Pittock:

> The perceived Germanicity of Protestantism also contributed to the paradigm whereby Highlanders/Celts were stereotyped as Catholic, which most were not. This in turn helped reinforce the mythology, sedulously fed by many of the Enlightenment writers themselves, in which Lowland Scotland was ethnically Germanic, and Highland Scotland Celtic.[104]

[102] *CP1*, p. 679 ('The Fingers of Baal Contract in the Communist Salute').
[103] *CP2*, p. 1372 ('The Poet as Prophet').
[104] Murray G.H. Pittock, 'Historiography', *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 266.

According to David Daiches, 'there was little fruitful inter-relation between Gaelic and non-Gaelic culture in eighteenth-century Scotland'.[105] This 'split' in the culture between the sophisticated *literati* of the metropolitan Enlightenment and the 'deeper cultural traditions of Scotland' suggests 'that the problems and paradoxes of Scottish culture in the eighteenth century were not only bound up with the past but also prefigured the future.'[106] For MacDiarmid in 1965, the cultural life of Robert Fergusson's Edinburgh, during the Enlightenment and in the present, 'boils merrily along among the common people, but is frozen stiff before it reaches the educated section of the population'.[107] The emphasis on the universal significance of the local at the heart of MacDiarmid's radical politics of place defies the cultural and political inferiorism of the geographic and class-based discrimination of the metropolitan Enlightenment by backing history's losers, those marginalized by the British state's political and cultural policy of standardization. However, reinvented as a bard of the *Gaedhealtacht*, the non-Gaelic speaking MacDiarmid simply transposes the dualisms of the Scottish Enlightenment that his Calvinism inherits. As such, he is one of Scotland's 'sham bards' who, like Edwin Muir, renders contemporary Scotland 'a sham nation'.[108] This metaphysical MacDiarmid doesn't see Scotland whole, he sees himself idealized – and calls his vision Scotland.

Scotland's actual material development was along British and imperial lines. As Tom Devine says, 'Empire-building was depicted as something peculiarly Scottish and as the fulfilment of a national destiny.'[109] For Devine, this investment in an imperial destiny did not undermine but rather strengthened a sense of Scottish identity:

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[105] David Daiches, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture: The Eighteenth-Century Experience* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 97.
[106] Daiches, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture*, pp. 10, 8, 97.
[107] *RT3*, p. 436 ('Edinburgh's Smoky Scene'); see Robert Crawford, 'Robert Fergusson's Robert Burns', *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. Robert Crawford (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999; 1997), pp. 1-22 for the subversive vernacularism of Fergusson's resistance to an Anglophone Enlightenment academia.
[108] Edwin Muir, 'Scotland 1941', *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984; 1963), p. 97.
[109] T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (London: Penguin, 2000; 1999), p. 290.

> it does not follow that, because the basis for a strong *political nationalism* did not exist in the Victorian era, Scottish national identity was therefore in itself inevitably emasculated. On the contrary, the economic success which helped to remove the basis of nationalist discontent was itself a tremendous source of national pride and congratulation.[110]

The marxist Neil Davidson is also unconvinced that Scotland was or is a sufferer at the hands of colonialism. Davidson's analysis of the origins of Scottish nationhood argues that 'Scotland was indeed an imperial nation within the context of the British state' and that 'Scottish participation in the Empire was the key external factor in constructing' what he believes to be 'the dual consciousness of Scottish people'.[111] He cites the industrial expansion of the eighteenth and nineteenth century to confirm his thesis, claiming that by 'the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815' the economies of Scotland and England were fused in a British alliance of industrial interest which ensured that 'far from being "peripheral" to the British economy, Scotland – or more precisely, the Lowlands – lay at its core'.[112]

Davidson is equally dismissive of the claims of nationalists, such as Beveridge and Turnbull, that Scotland is a victim of cultural imperialism. Davidson claims that the famous example of Enlightenment philosophes' efforts to remove Scotticisms from their work, which could be seen as a sign of cultural inferiorization, had more to do with the commercial wish for 'comprehensibility to the greatest public' than any desire to be English on the part of writers such as Boswell, Smollett and Hume and that after the 'English Scotophobia' of the post-1745 period had decreased so too did the 'element of self-defence in their attempts not to display Scottish traits in their writing'.[113] Davidson then goes on to cite Cairns Craig's argument that Hume's work

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[110] Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*, p. 289.
[111] Neil Davidson, *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood*, (London & Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2000) pp. 111, 127, 111.
[112] Davidson, *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood*, p. 94.
[113] Ibid., p. 100.

is not an attempt to accede to Englishness but rather upper-class conformity within a British framework, before arguing that

> many leading Scottish figures were developing and implementing economic strategies which they saw as conducive to the betterment of Scotland at precisely the same time that they were removing Scoticisms from their writings: greater weight should perhaps be given to the former rather than the latter aspect of their activities.[114]

Davidson's analysis of Scotland's political and cultural situation is useful as it allows us to keep in perspective the claims of some nationalists and postcolonial theorists that Scottish experience can be paralleled with the colonial exploitation of black peoples. Beveridge and Turnbull, and Michael Gardiner, use the Martiniquan Frantz Fanon as a model, and Gardiner also uses Fanon's fellow French-Martiniquan, postcolonial poet Aimé Césaire. Profoundly serious and interesting as these writers are, and useful as theoretical tools, there can be no significant comparison between the colonial violence and forced labour visited upon the nations of black Africa – often by the imperialism of the Scots of Michael Fry's 'Scottish Empire', sedulously led by Enlightenment rationality – and the ambiguously dualistic Scottish experience of imperialism.[115] Ania Loomba claims that the theoretical appropriation of Fanon is also problematized by the dissonant experience of colonialism of the intellectuals and the masses:

> Fanon's split subject should not be read as the paradigmatic colonised subject: the psychic dislocations Fanon discusses are more likely to be felt by native elites or those colonised individuals who were educated within, and to some extent invited to be mobile within the colonial system than those who existed on its margins.[116]

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[114] Davidson, *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood*, pp. 100, 101; see also Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 28.
[115] See Davidson, pp. 96-7; Michael Fry, *The Scottish Empire* (East Lothian & Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press & Birlinn, 2001).
[116] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism / Postcolonialism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 147.

Arif Dirlik succinctly confirms this point: 'Postcoloniality is the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism.'[117] MacDiarmid's thinking on Scottish culture – his dualistic denial of the actual in the name of the essential – can be better understood as the schizoid cultural condition of a radical Scottish autodidact sceptical of the metropolitan tenor of, yet influenced by, Enlightenment universalism; his international politics of independent Scottish place an attempt to re-synchronize a local and universal sundered by the Scottish Enlightenment.

Robert Crawford also makes many of Davidson's points about the British orientation of the Scottish Enlightenment:

> The growing wish for a 'pure' English in eighteenth-century Scotland was not an anti-Scottish gesture, but a pro-British one. If Britain were to work as a political unit, then the Scots should rid themselves of any elements likely to impede their progress within it. Language, the most important of bonds, must not be allowed to hinder Scotland's intercourse with expanding economic and intellectual markets in the freshly defined British state.[118]

For Crawford, the result of the Scottish Enlightenment's 'pursuit of improving linguistic studies' was 'The Scottish Invention of English Literature'.[119] However, the anti-British gesture of recovering a Scottish voice, and subsequently a Scottish culture and politics, is at the root of MacDiarmid's nationalist synthetic Scots, but also inherent in his idiosyncratic marxism, which sees Britain as a commercially motivated construct facilitating international capitalism. MacDiarmid reconciles the dualism of his positions through a radical Scottish Republican politics of place. For the most part, the lineaments of his twin opposition to capitalism and colonialism remain stubbornly separate in the present culture. It is interesting that the marxist Davidson and the nationalist Crawford should each see their ideological position strengthened by

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[117] Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Critical Inquiry* 20 (2), Winter, pp. 328-56, quoted in Loomba, *Colonialism / Postcolonialism*, p. 247.
[118] Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, p. 18.
[119] See Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, Ch. 1; see also *The Scottish Invention of English Literature*, ed. Robert Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

making essentially the same point, the different Scottish political futures they want emerging from an identical juncture in Scottish history – the Enlightenment.

In his essay 'Problems of Nationalism, Identity and Improvement in later Eighteenth-Century Scotland', T.C. Smout says that 'Nowhere in Europe was [the] sense of national identity more complex than in Scotland'.[120] Smout argues that Scots in the age of Enlightenment had a dual national consciousness or, following Anthony Smith's description, 'concentric loyalties'.[121] Scots stayed loyal to their 'ethnic-national' identity while also incorporating themselves into a larger state framework: consequently 'most Scots felt themselves to be both Scottish and British'.[122] The sense of transcending national boundaries that the concept of British statehood may have implied for many in the eighteenth century was immensely important, in particular to the Enlightenment philosophes. As Thomas Schlereth tells us, 'Modern historians, with considerable regularity, have identified cosmopolitanism as a characteristic of Enlightenment.'[123]

Schlereth means by Enlightenment cosmopolitanism 'an attitude of mind that attempted to transcend chauvinistic national loyalties or parochial prejudices in its intellectual interests and pursuits'.[124] This is crucial to an understanding of a Scottish Enlightenment that according to Cairns Craig progressively sought 'to locate Scottish history within a universal system'.[125] For Schlereth, 'the typical Enlightenment cosmopolite' can be defined as having been 'eclectic in his philosophical and scientific

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[120] T.C. Smout, 'Problems of Nationalism, Identity and Improvement in later Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Improvement and Enlightenment: Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar, University of Strathclyde, 1987-88*, ed. T.M. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1989), p. 3.
[121] Smout, in *Improvement and Enlightenment*, p. 2.
[122] Ibid., pp. 2, 5.
[123] Thomas J. Schlereth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought: Its Form and Function in the Ideas of Franklin, Hume, and Voltaire, 1694-1790* (Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), p. xi.
[124] Schlereth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought*, p. xi.
[125] Cairns Craig, 'The Fratricidal Twins: Scottish Literature, Scottish History and the Construction of Scottish Culture', *The Polar Twins*, ed. Edward J. Cowan & Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1999), p. 30.

outlook, synergistic in his religious perspective, and international in his economic and political thought'.[126] This is a good description of MacDiarmid's manifesto: an autodidact's generalist mingling of native, European and Eastern philosophy in a poetry that wishes to be reconciled with the discoveries of science; a spiritual evolutionism inherited from, amongst others, Calvin and Nietzsche; and a radical understanding of the international hold of capitalism exemplified in his Douglasism and marxism.

Schlereth goes on to describe Enlightenment cosmopolitanism as the 'psychological construct' of an 'elite intellectual class' that allowed them to travel intellectually through cultural space and time and so universalize their studies.[127] This is the paradox of Scottish culture that MacDiarmid's politics of place attempt to solve: the universalizing project of the Scottish Enlightenment, largely undertaken by a middle class of liberal, academic, metropolitan males, troubles the independent trajectory of the nation though its attachment to Anglophone standards, thus eclipsing the real Scotland that the poet so assiduously identifies with himself. MacDiarmid understands that nationalism and internationalism, the local and the universal, are inextricably bound, finding outlet in a radical Scottish Republicanism – a fusion of Scottish nationalism and international communism – that is metaphysical in its absolutist pursuit of the cultural and political whole. By asserting the global importance of the local, MacDiarmid redefines the previously negative definition of 'provincial' provoked by the Scottish Enlightenment's cultural self-repression – so challenging the false cosmopolitanism of the metropolis – whilst holding on to the internationalist, universal outlook of Enlightenment materialism.

David Hume captures the totalizing project of Enlightenment rationality:

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[126] Schlereth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought*, pp. xi-xii.
[127] Ibid., pp. xiii, xii.

> It is universally acknowledged that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same in its principles and operations.[128]

Such universalism has been questioned by postcolonial theorists, keen to debunk the myth of historical and social neutrality conveyed by Schlereth's 'cosmopolitan ideal'. The stereotypic dualities of colonial discourse imply that the purported rational maturity of the enlightened culture has a civilizing duty to those primitive nations that lag behind in the capitalist order. The Enlightenment rationale then becomes both the economic reason for, and the intellectual rationalization of, colonialism. The improvement implied in the Enlightenment civilizing mission of colonialism is always towards the cosmopolitan standards of the imperial metropolis.[129] However, as both Crawford and Davidson indicate in their analyses of the internalization of Scotticisms in the eighteenth century, the metropolitan culture is inextricably altered through its contact with other cultures, even if metropolitan historiography pretends otherwise.

Michael Gardiner in Chapter Four of his postcolonial study of modern Scottishness, 'Towards a theory of Scottish Identity', quotes Ian Duncan to this affect: 'The making of metropolitan identity is the project of ambitious provincials rather than those who already inhabit the metropolis.'[130] Gardiner sees MacDiarmid's work as 'a strong provincial-modernist response to the Scottish Enlightenment's destruction of Scottish culture'.[131] However, he believes that MacDiarmid's modernist teleology denies the alterity inherent in the postcolonial condition. MacDiarmid's desire to solder the ruptures of post-Union Scottish identity through his individualistic

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[128] David Hume, quoted in Andrew S. Skinner, 'Economic theory', *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 180.
[129] See Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 30-4 for a postcolonial response to the question 'What is Enlightenment?'.
[130] Ian Duncan, quoted in Michael Gardiner, 'Postcoloniality, Modernity and Scottish Cultural Identity: Models from Literature and Theory' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 1999), p. 157.
[131] Gardiner, 'Postcoloniality, Modernity and Scottish Cultural Identity: Models from Literature and Theory', p. 211.

Nietzschean will and Poundian strong ego fails because it neglects to recognize the 'double-determined' nature of (postcolonial) identity.[132] Addressing MacDiarmid's use of Scots as a means of mobilizing national consciousness, Gardiner argues that

> A MacDiarmid-style final solution emerges, in which a rigidly discrete language is a moral imperative, a decision of the entire nationalised will of the individual, underwritten by solid images of a nation past and fixed, and definitely without trace of English alterity.[133]

MacDiarmid's modernism, coupled with his use of synthetic language, brings 'Scottish identity to productive crisis' by exposing the reality that in a postcolonial context there is no longer 'a prior national subject'.[134] For Gardiner, MacDiarmid fails to 'link the modern mutation of the Enlightenment subject' with the heterogeneity of identity – 'gender, class, ethnicity' – in a postcolonial Scotland.[135]

Gardiner's mainly negative conclusions about MacDiarmid's influence on the concept of Scottish identity – his chapter on the poet is called 'The Unmodern Legacy of Hugh MacDiarmid' – arise from his denial of MacDiarmid's ideological and artistic complexity, his almost wilfully anarchic many-sidedness. Gardiner also fails to appreciate the radicalism of MacDiarmid's Scottish Republicanism, focusing on what he sees as the poet's racialism. Certainly, MacDiarmid resolutely seeks to counter the 'English Over-Burden' in British politics and culture, and talk of 'inducing Scotland to realize its *Ur-motives*' as a means of doing so is perhaps not helpful.[136] MacDiarmid's essentialist organicism can be seen as a dualistic reflection of the dominant culture's imperialistic modes, but it is also a strategic means of attempting to defy Anglocentricism.

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[132] Gardiner, 'Postcoloniality, Modernity and Scottish Cultural Identity: Models from Literature and Theory', p. 166.
[133] Ibid., p. 194.
[134] Ibid., pp. 243, 246.
[135] Ibid., p. 209.
[136] See *RT3*, pp. 476-9 ('Beneath the English Over-Burden'); MacDiarmid uses the German phrase *Ur-motives* often in his work, in this instance, *Company*, p. 250.

Postcolonial theory critiques the essentializing manoeuvres of colonial discourse, understanding them to be deterministic, perhaps mystical, and a rationalization for racism. Yet postcolonialism, along with other academic theories which have an interest in political and social emancipation, such as feminism, may need to rely on what Gayatri Spivak has termed 'operational essentialism' in order to resist the essentializing procedures of colonial discourse, even if we can ascribe no 'ontological integrity' to the subject of our liberationist drive, such as womanhood or the nation.[137] An understanding of identity that apprehends the (psychological and cultural) alterity of the subject is a useful theoretical tool that allows us to perceive the hybridism of cultural construction. However, by challenging the essential wholeness of subject formation it also undermines the possibility of political action arising from a sense that the subject position of the colonized, as seen and constructed by the colonizer, is subordinate. This is important in Scotland where according to James Kelman, 'There is simply no question that by the criteria of the ruling elite of Great Britain so-called Scottish culture, for example, is inferior, just as *ipso facto* the Scottish people are also inferior'; as such, 'Scotland is oppressed'.[138] Kelman understands essences such as 'Scotsman' and 'Scottish culture' to be 'material absurdities'.[139] However, as Ania Loomba says, 'Decentring the subject allows for a social reading of language and representations, but it can also make it impossible to think about a subject capable of acting and challenging the *status quo.*'[140]

MacDiarmid mobilizes a tactical essentialism in culturally combating metropolitan Anglocentricism that can be racist. For instance, he argues that 'one of

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[137] Gayatri Spivak, 'Remarks, Center for the Humanities, Wesleyan University, Spring 1985', quoted in Judith Butler, 'Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse', *Feminism / Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 325; Butler also refers to Julia Kristeva's recommendation that 'feminists use the category of women as a political tool without attributing ontological integrity to the term', ibid.

[138] James Kelman, *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political* (Stirling: AK Press, 1992), pp. 71, 72.

[139] Kelman, *Some Recent Attacks*, p. 72.

[140] Loomba, *Colonialism / Postcolonialism*, pp. 42-3.

the principal aims' of the Scottish Renaissance movement is '"To put Scotland on the map of Europe" again':

> It is agreed that our cultural plight, and national plight generally, is largely due to the severance of our contact with Europe, in relation to which at large, and in regard to France, Holland, the Scandinavian countries, and Russia in particular, Scotland for centuries played a very important and distinctive role. [...] From the political point of view the matter has a profound bearing on the vital question of 'Europe or the Empire', and resolves itself in more extreme Scottish nationalist minds into the declaration that 'England has betrayed Europe'.[141]

MacDiarmid must, of course, be counted among the 'extreme' Scottish nationalists who believe that 'England has betrayed Europe'. In so doing, England is playing fast-and-loose with 'the great questions of the "Defence of the West", the conservation and furtherance of European civilisation, and the continuance of white supremacy', ideas that MacDiarmid believes the Scottish Renaissance movement to be championing.[142] Chapter Three of this thesis will return to MacDiarmid's Defence of the West as he expounds it from the marginality of Whalsay, understanding it to be a provincialist apologia of cultural difference and political autonomy. The editors of Volume II of *The Raucle Tongue* comment on 'continuance of white supremacy' as presuming 'approval for colonial rule in the tropical world, and connivance in racism'.[143] Coming as it does from the 1931 essay 'Whither Scotland?', this is hard to square with MacDiarmid's earlier contention at an ILP meeting in Montrose in 1927 that we must abandon the idea of maintaining the supremacy of the white race.[144] However, MacDiarmid's ideas on Scotland and empire have a complicated chronology. The Home Rule movement of the early part of the twentieth century, which MacDiarmid supported, saw no contradiction between greater Scottish autonomy and continuing the

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[141] *RT2*, p. 262 ('Whither Scotland?').
[142] Ibid.
[143] Calder, Murray and Riach, ed., *RT2*, p. 563.
[144] See Chapter Two of this thesis, 'A Disgrace to the Community', p. 97.

overseas exploitation of colonial dominions. As MacDiarmid on Whalsay moved towards the John MacLean-Scottish Republican line his anti-British imperialism hardened. Such racism on MacDiarmid's part comes fairly late in his evolution towards opposition to Scotland's involvement in British imperialism.

From the metaphysical *A Drunk Man* to his polemical attempts to restructure an inferiorized Scottish identity purged of the anglified elements that he believes have a provincializing effect on the nation, MacDiarmid depends upon essences that equate England with that which is detrimental and the real, radically republican Scotland as its dualistic opposite. In a 1937 letter celebrating the release of Welsh nationalists from prison for politically motivated arson, MacDiarmid writes of 'our common enemy – the callous and unscrupulous English, the cruellest people in the history of mankind'.[145] The idea of an anti-European, narrowly nationalist and imperial England is forcefully expressed in the 'England is Our Enemy' section of *In Memoriam James Joyce*, particularly with regard to what MacDiarmid sees as English philistinism in comparison to continental European attitudes to the arts. For MacDiarmid, 'The Foreigner sees or feels that the national arts / Are a product of the national voice' and, therefore, European governments support their native artists because they understand that culture helps inform and build a sense of national identity:

> So the German State makes axioms of Schiller and Goethe;
> The French Republic produces the plays
> Of Racine and Molière; Italy
> Honours Dante, Tasso, and Petrarch
> Whenever it has an opportunity.[146]

The British state has a more *laissez-faire* approach to cultural production and, as such, 'Anglo-Saxondom would not tolerate / Government interference with the arts' for fear

[145] *NSL*, p. 143 (to The Chairman, Welsh Nationalist Meeting, 23 August 1937).
[146] *CP2*, pp. 860, 861 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).

that in opening up culture to more than elite consumption revolutionary societal changes take place:

> That it would depose its kings
> Refuse to elects its presidents,
> Revolt, erect barricades,
> If the State had theatres in which Shakespeare,
> Congreve, Vanbrugh, Robertson, and, say, Goethe
> Were honoured by classical-minded renderings![147]

However, this radical state is impossible to imagine because 'Anglo-Saxondom / Does not know that it has any arts'.[148]

Even as late as the imperiously anti-imperial *In Memoriam James Joyce*, published in 1955 but at least partly written while he was on Whalsay in the thirties, MacDiarmid chooses to racialize the reasons behind what he sees as Anglo-American and English philistinism:

> Literature of the imagination in Anglo-Saxondom then
> Is not a very thriving affair
> Because it has lost touch completely
> With racial life.[149]

The colonial discourse of imperial nations such as 'Anglo-Saxon' Britain would deliberately racialize the Other through its universalizing tendencies. In a postcolonial age, this would leave the former colonizer lacking a cultural identity outwith the dualistic colonial relationship.

Leela Gandhi, discussing the work of Tom Nairn, suggests that Nairn's conception of nationalism in *The Break-Up of Britain* as 'The Modern Janus' helps us to understand 'western anti-nationalism':

> could we, for instance, diagnose metropolitan anti-nationalism as an attempt to purge European nationalism of its own atavism, and in so doing, to

[147] *CP2*, p. 861 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[148] Ibid.
[149] *CP2*, p. 863.

> project 'regressive' nationalisms elsewhere? Indeed, much Western anti-nationalism is informed by the assumption that the progressive history of the nation swerves dangerously off course in its anti-colonial manifestation, and that relatedly cultural nationalism tragically distorts the foundational modernity of nation-ness.[150]

This marxist Nairn uses the racialized Enlightenment dualisms that he inherits from the schizoid Grieve-MacDiarmid, Calvinist Lowland Scot and pseudo-Gaelic makar. Despite his provincial's understanding of marginalization, MacDiarmid is unable to fully shake off a metropolitan Enlightenment legacy, making the same theoretical manoeuvre in his dualistic demonizing of the English as imperial nations do in their universalist bid for imperial hegemony. However, MacDiarmid's autochthonous politics of place are based on the unrepentant knowledge that English nationalism has also worked to stereotype the Scots:

> My anti-English proclivities have been railed at as mischievous – by people who did not realise how anti-Scottish in effect, if not intention, the opposite sentiment has consistently proved since the Union. It is not a question of failing to recognise England's particular qualities; but of appreciating that these have been produced by inhibiting the development of other very different qualities. A concern with the latter is just as legitimate as a fondness for the former. Besides, the future lies with the concern in question rather than with the fondness which is generally an incurious, supine acceptance of the existing state of affairs.[151]

MacDiarmid's mature marxian art, in particular *In Memoriam James Joyce*, continues to oppose the English imperial ethos by seeking an internationalist synthesis of world languages and cultures in contradistinction to what the radical Scottish Republican sees as the insular nationalism of monarchical England and its global extension, British imperialism. This tends towards a totalizing view that, like Pound's *Cantos*, can be read as a further variation of the Western imperialism that it aims to oppose. However, the poetry of generalist knowledge has the merit of a sometimes

[150] Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, p. 107.
[151] *RT2*, p. 396 ('An Earlier Anglophobe').

breathtaking eclecticism, an anti-essentialism informed by the awareness that there are innumerably different national and psychological variations:

> Above all I rejoice that we are not
> All 'Joan Thompson's bairns'
> But that there are many, perhaps countless,
> Even mutually incomprehensible, types[152]

MacDiarmid understands that both capital and country require the compliance of replica humans, facsimiles of essential models rather than free individuals:

> (Can any human being ever understand another?
> The great Gods, Work, Money, Government,
> May require and secure conformity,
> But all finally good considerations require
> The accentuation of differences
> To the Nth degree.)[153]

The radical Scottish nationalist, who in Montrose created a metaphysical Scots poetry that sought to oppose the nation's provincialization, now writes a materialist poetry in postcolonial English:

> All dreams of 'imperialism' must be exorcised
> Including linguistic imperialism, which sums up all the rest.[154]

'Loathing all Imperialisms, colour-bars, and class-distinctions', he wants a poetry of synthetic English that defies the Anglocentric imperialism of the bourgeois literary centre.[155]

In Memoriam James Joyce was published just a year before the Soviet invasion of Hungary on 30 October 1956. MacDiarmid had been expelled from the CPGB for

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[152] *CP2*, p. 843 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[153] Ibid.
[154] *CP2*, p. 790.
[155] *CP2*, p. 782.

nationalist deviation, but was re-admitted on 20 February 1957.[156] MacDiarmid wrote an article for the *Daily Worker* of 28 March 1957 entitled 'Why I Rejoined' in which he describes Stalinism as 'a mere bagatelle' in comparison to the depredations of capitalism.[157] Given that Soviet Russia was one of the most oppressive imperial forces of the twentieth century, MacDiarmid's claims to anti-imperialism need to be treated with caution. Such a claim rests principally with his opposition to Western and, in particular, British imperialism:

> The English play the waiting game the longest,
> The best, and win most often. In this angry world
> They will be the last to relinquish
> Their hereditary and imperial property rights.[158]

The marxist MacDiarmid can support perhaps the most totalitarian imperial regime of the twentieth century, while the nationalist MacDiarmid simultaneously opposes the cultural and political remnants of the largest imperial power of the nineteenth century in which his own nation played such a central role. A sequential, yet complementary movement can be detected in MacDiarmid's poetic and political evolution. The strategic essentialism of his 1920s metaphysical nationalism and Scots poetry written in Montrose creatively and theoretically re-establishes the cultural and political centrality of a distinctly Scottish voice hushed by Anglophone Enlightenment metropolitanism. The cultural eclecticism of the later synthetic English poetry of generalist knowledge begun in Whalsay in the thirties, with its anti-essentialist postcolonial and marxist bearings drawn from an Enlightenment rationalism that is a

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[156] MacDiarmid was expelled from the CPGB in November 1936, re-admitted in 1937 and expelled once more in February 1939; see John Manson, 'The Poet and the Party', *Cencrastus* 68, pp. 35-8 for the chronology of MacDiarmid's membership of the CPGB.

[157] Quoted in Bold, *MacDiarmid*, p. 411; MacDiarmid's fellow modernist Wyndham Lewis defended Nazi anti-Semitism as also being a 'mere bagatelle', quoted in John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 196; MacDiarmid defends Lewis's right to speak out in favour of Hitler's economics, *RT2*, pp. 405-7 ('Scotland, Hitler and Wyndham Lewis').

[158] *CP1*, p. 649 ('The British Empire').

significant foretokening of the materialism of Marx, internationalizes a nation marginalized by the metropolitan core. Both the localism and universalism of MacDiarmid's radical Scottish Republican politics of place display differing, yet ultimately integrated, ideological response to the imperial dualities of the Scottish Enlightenment.

The apparent dualism of MacDiarmid's thinking can undermine understanding of his politics, causing his work to be a source of prideful artistic and ideological inspiration, but also a sometimes problematic terminus for Scottish critics. A self-identity structured to coincide so categorically with national particularity makes an examination of MacDiarmid also an investigation of modern Scottish identity. As Robert Crawford states:

> MacDiarmid has come to be seen as the foremost representative of twentieth-century Scottish culture, and *A Drunk Man* as one of the most important artworks emerging from and dealing with the Scottish tradition. Yet more and more we are becoming aware of how much MacDiarmid, his work, and the Scottishness of both are complexly manufactured.[159]

The personal identity of Christopher Murray Grieve was to proliferate and take on many guises in a long writing career, with Hugh MacDiarmid being only the most renowned. The pseudonyms under which he operated include 'Gillechriosd Mooraidh Mac a' Ghreidhir', 'A.K. Laidlaw', 'A.L.', 'James MacLaren', 'Stentor' and 'Pteleon', to which can be added 'Isobel Guthrie', 'Arthur Leslie' and 'Mountboy': there may be more that have yet to be discovered.[160]

The procreative parental dualism of Grieve-MacDiarmid and their multiplicity of offspring is a device familiar to the fragmented identity of literary modernism. Witness the disquietingly heteronomous Fernando Pessoa – 'My God, my God, who

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[159] Crawford, *Identifying Poets*, p. 62.
[160] See Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve) and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh & London: Chambers, 1964); see also 'A Disgrace to the Community', Chapter Two of this thesis, for MacDiarmid's many guises in Montrose.

am I watching? How many am I? Who is I? What is this gap between me and me?' – poet of another latterly peripheral, once imperial nation: 'O bitter sea, how much of all your gall / Is bitter tears of Portugal!'.[161] However, the tendency to mask one's real identity seems even more pronounced in a national literary culture awash with a phenomenon that Hamish Henderson terms 'Alias MacAlias'.[162] One explanation for the past diffidence of Scottish writers in revealing their true selves is that in a nation provincialized by its relations with a political and cultural imperium and the credo of Calvinism artists lack the confidence to enter by the front door, as it were, fearing a frosty reception for their work: hence the over-compensatory elitism of the poet-martyr pronouncing himself 'a genius in a provincial town' while in Montrose, where Grieve became MacDiarmid.[163] The poet's troubling of identity, both personal and national, can be politically optimistic and combative. In a postcolonial terrain, identity itself is a debatable land, the multiplying of self both a form of cultural self-defence and a route to political liberation. However, a dualistic MacDiarmid could also claim that 'the real Scottish spirit' is 'antipathetic' to the idea of 'uniformity and a common goal', the reason this Scottish nationalist wrote that 'The most distinctively Scottish national feature may be a repudiation not an acceptance, of nationalism'.[164] Such surface contradictions in MacDiarmid's politics of place can be most usefully summarized in relation to the Scottish Enlightenment, a determining moment in the history of the national culture that the poet makes surprisingly little reference to, perhaps because its origins ostensibly appear to be a fruit of the Union.[165]

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[161] Fernando Pessoa, from *The Book of Disquietude* (trans. Richard Zenith), 'Sea of Portugal' (trans. Keith Bosley), in *A Centenary Pessoa*, ed. Eugénio Lisboa with L.C. Taylor (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), pp. 176, 27.

[162] See Hamish Henderson, *Alias MacAlias: Writings on Songs, Folk and Literature* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993; 1992) pp. 304-7 for Henderson's analysis of Grieve-MacDiarmid, 'the two-headed bard', p. 305.

[163] *LP*, p. 411.

[164] *RTI*, p. 319 ('The Course of Scottish Poetry'); p. 243 ('Scottish Music').

[165] Alexander Broadie demonstrates how the Scottish Enlightenment issues from a pre-Union tradition of Scottish philosophy in *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001) and *Why Scottish Philosophy Matters* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 2000).

The Enlightenment project, such a central part of Scotland's intellectual history, played a crucial role in building the idea of the nation-state and the dualism inherent in imperial design. However, in Scotland the Enlightenment inaugurated a crucial period of modern Britishness, an attempt by an older nation to incorporate its statehood in a larger imperial framework. As Murray Pittock states, 'The paradox of the Scottish Enlightenment was that so many autonomous ideas rose from this paradigm of conformity.'[166] In a lecture to Edinburgh University in April 1961, the marxist MacDiarmid cites sceptical Hume as 'the greatest Scotsman who has ever lived'.[167] However, as Pittock points out, the philosopher's Anglocentic historiography, encapsulated by his *History of England* (published *in toto* 1778) – curious that the poet cites the philosopher as 'An Earlier Anglophobe' – did much to encourage the damaging dualism of Scottish culture that MacDiarmid inherits yet seeks to politically and culturally transcend.[168] Similarly, Gordon Graham claims that to his Scottish philosophical contemporaries of the eighteenth century, such as Thomas Reid and James Beattie, the Lockean Hume was 'not properly regarded as an exponent of Scottish philosophy at all', perhaps one historiographical reason why he is now 'Scotland's most famous philosopher'.[169] With Hume and William Robertson amongst others, the Anglophone Scottish Enlightenment continues the Union's eclipse of a distinctive Scottish culture and politics at a moment when, paradoxically, Edinburgh was the centre of the intellectual world.[170]

MacDiarmid's early lyrics in Scots and particularly *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, examine the psychological and cultural hangover of the metropolitan

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[166] Murray G.H. Pittock, 'Historiography', *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 260.
[167] *A*, p. 297 ('David Hume: Scotland's Greatest Son').
[168] See *RT2*, pp. 396-7 ('An Earlier Anglophobe').
[169] Gordon Graham, 'The nineteenth-century aftermath', *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 341.
[170] See Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: Inferiorism and the Intellectuals* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), and their *Scotland After Enlightenment: Image and Tradition in Modern Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1997).

Enlightenment's occlusion of Scottish culture and politics, doing so from what George Davie describes as an anti-Pelagian stance. The metaphysical spiralling out from the particular to the universal in *A Drunk Man* may be characterized as an attempt by the poet to transcend the provincializing national consequences of rationalist Enlightenment metropolitanism. Tom Nairn describes this dualistic battle between the micro of the local and the macro of the universal:

> The only terrain available is the Kailyard, from which of course symbolic flight is obligatory – if not into emigration, then into symbolic emigration, the Cosmic Universalism MacDiarmid has made his second home. One is driven towards 'the totality, the general balance of things' because the particular balance of things in one's country is so intolerable, because its schizophrenia threatens 'cancellation to nonentity'. One must fight for the absent because the present is what it is, for forlorn hopes because the real hopes are so small.[171]

MacDiarmid's work after *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, which Davie cites as the crisis-point in MacDiarmid's *Weltanschauung*, is an undertaking to fight for the global internationalist future rather than an absent metaphysical nationalism, an attempt to reinstate the materialist Enlightenment rationale as a viable historical proposition.[172] Each phase in MacDiarmid's argument with Enlightenment, from 1920s Montrose to thirties Whalsay, finds radical synthesis in a Scottish Republican politics of place.

If the inception of modernity is posited as the Enlightenment period, modernism as a cultural phenomenon can be seen as the collapse of Enlightenment hopes. But for MacDiarmid, the political ruins other modernists were seeking to shore with the fragments of classical literary texts are not necessarily worth saving. His modernism is an attempt to hasten a collapsing imperial cultural and political edifice in the

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[171] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, p. 169; the movement from the particularity of a marginalized or oppressed local culture to the healing mystical totality of the universal that we find in *A Drunk Man* is also central to Aimé Césaire's postcolonial poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*).

[172] See George Elder Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect: The Problem of Generalism and Specialisation in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), Chs. 7 & 8.

realization that such cultural precedence is a political construct manufactured largely by and through economic might. As we shall see in the next chapter, in his communitarianism in provincial Montrose, and through his oft-repeated maxim that 'True nationalism and true internationalism are complementary and indispensable to each other', MacDiarmid understands the localized and diverse range of cultural identity.[173] The root of MacDiarmid's anti-metropolitan, universalist politics can be traced to his place of birth in small-town Langholm.

The Scottish Borders

The 'debatable land' of the Scottish Borders, and MacDiarmid's Langholm birthplace in that region, provided a dialectical source of inspiration throughout the poet's career. It is a place of almost Edenic childhood delight and natural wonder on the one hand; on the other, it is somewhere MacDiarmid had to leave in order to re-imagine Scotland, despite the fact that his imagination constantly returned home. This section examines provincial MacDiarmid's connection with the Borders and Langholm and describes how, from that sometimes strained relationship, originates an internationalist politics of place.

Many of MacDiarmid's more positive thoughts about being brought up in a small town are set down in an article from the *Voice of Scotland* of April 1946. The date is important in situating some of the ideas in 'Out of the World and into Langholm'. MacDiarmid begins this short piece by claiming that 'The small town is a sort of protection against the disharmonies evolved around efforts for World peace and security'.[174] He makes the case that the community ethos of a place that is small enough for everyone to know each other is 'infinitely more preferable to the

[173] *RT2*, p. 243 ('Scottish Music').
[174] *RT3*, p. 102 ('Out of the World and into Langholm').

anonymity of the great cities'.[175] MacDiarmid disliked cities, being particularly scornful of Glasgow and Edinburgh, perhaps seeing them as 'the twin metropolitan foci of England's internal colonization' so-called by MacDonald Daly and Colin Troup.[176] In 'Dìreadh II', the natural beauties of the underpopulated areas of the country are 'the real Scotland':

> This, not Edinburgh and Glasgow, which are rubbish,
> The Scotland of the loathsome beasties climbing the wall
> And the rats hunting in the corners
> Which it is next to impossible to believe
> Coexists with this, and men value – *Men?*[177]

MacDiarmid is in danger of committing the same elitist mistake as Duncan Thaw in Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981) of emptying his imaginary, utopian landscape of the very people who could attempt to change the urban capitalist reality that both despair of.[178]

In 'Out of the World and into Langholm' MacDiarmid says, 'A remarkable fact about small places is the index of how far we have gone astray in the modern world.'[179] This does not sound like a marxist poet, keen to do battle with the dialectical depredations and progress brought by capital, but more a bucolic Tory gent complaining in the correspondence page of *The Times*. MacDiarmid's anti-metropolitanism can certainly be seen as a nationalist response to colonialism, but it can also have reactionary traces, something that Christopher Hitchens discerns in 'those credulous customers who think they dislike the Establishment':

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[175] *RT3*, p. 102 ('Out of the World and into Langholm').
[176] MacDonald Daly and Colin Troup, 'Oxford no' come back again', *THES*, 6 January 1989, quoted in Andrew Lockhart Walker, *The Revival of the Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1994), p. 56.
[177] *CP2*, p. 1175 ('Dìreadh II').
[178] See Cairns Craig, 'Going Down to Hell is Easy: *Lanark*, Realism and the Limits of Imagination', *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, ed. Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp. 90-107.
[179] *RT3*, p. 102 ('Out of the World and into Langholm').

> In England, of course, it has been somewhat emulsified by various Chestertonian and indeed Eliotian tropes – preferences for the countryside over the town, an instinct for history and the nation, reservations about the 'cosmopolitan', a dislike of the capital and the City, a belief in the common sense of the folk.[180]

MacDiarmid is clearly no little Englander on the Larkin model, but his work can stray into the realms of the Scotshire that he criticised in Neil Gunn.[181] He attempts to mitigate this through his internationalist marxism. However, in his attitude to cities generally, and the urbanized central belt of Scotland in particular, he betrays a reactionary streak that is at odds with his radical self-image and his desire to see Scotland whole.

'Out of the World and into Langholm' continues the anti-city theme with MacDiarmid contending that civilizational achievement and high intelligence are coterminous with being of provincial birth:

> All the writers, poets and scientists that Britain has produced belong to small towns. London has contributed practically none. All over the world the same thing is true. During the war a new set of intelligence tests were applied and were based on American methods. The result showed that the people who did pass were people from remote places and very particularly from places that had no contact with European life at all.[182]

MacDiarmid somewhat undermines his own argument by having recourse to 'American methods' and at the heart of this sweeping statement there is obviously a case of special pleading for the importance of his own talents. However, he sees that a historical knowledge of the local environment is as important as 'being taught about kings and queens of England and wars on the Continent'.[183] MacDiarmid believes that

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[180] Christopher Hitchens, *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere* (London & New York: Verso 2001), p. 211; Hitchens's article, 'Something about the Poems', is on Philip Larkin.
[181] According to Gunn, MacDiarmid said that 'Neil Gunn is wrapped in the cotton wool of bourgeois respectability', Francis Russell Hart and J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life* (London: John Murray, 1981), p. 115.
[182] *RT3*, p. 102 ('Out of the World and into Langholm').
[183] *RT3*, p. 103.

the cultural 'treasures' of humanity can still come 'frae lanely places, / No' the croodit centres o' mankind'.[184] In this, he asserts an international politics of place developing from the debatable land of his Borders birth.

A forty-eight year old MacDiarmid writes in *Lucky Poet*:

> All the chief elements of my life to-day, however developed and enriched by subsequent experience, were quick in me by at least my early teens, and I am now, despite my long absence from the scenes of my boyhood, more of a Langholmite than ever.[185]

In a letter to his first wife Peggy, MacDiarmid threatens to tell 'the whole story in my *Autobiography*' of their marriage and bitter divorce.[186] It was the experience of separation from Peggy and his children with her, Christine and Walter, which sent MacDiarmid's imagination back to Langholm in *First Hymn to Lenin and other Poems* (1931). In this collection, MacDiarmid dons the guise of the fighting Borderer in order to resolutely question the religion of his childhood and the family life so important to its perpetuation. This distancing from the bonds of family begins in 'At My Father's Grave', in which the poet declares 'I'm nae mair your son'.[187] However, it is not simply death that has separated them but the spiritual evolution of the poet since leaving Langholm and his adoption of a value system that conflicts markedly with his father's religious convictions:

> It is my mind, nae son o' yours, that looks,
> And the great darkness o' your death comes up
> And equals it across the way.
> A livin' man upon a deid man thinks
> And ony sma'er thocht's impossible.[188]

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[184] *CP2*, p. 1424 ('The Borders').
[185] *LP*, p. 39.
[186] *NSL*, p. 148 (to Peggy Grieve, 17 November 1937).
[187] *CP1*, p. 299 ('At My Father's Grave').
[188] Ibid.

'First Hymn to Lenin' signifies where that intellectual development has taken the poet. However, the communism that this poem espouses is a suspicious foreign creed to the residents of Langholm and the internationalism of its ideas is a rejoinder to the localism of the poems to come. It is 'At my Father's Grave' that more surely tells us how the collection will develop.

'Prayer for a Second Flood' craftily uses the religious imagery familiar to Langholmites in order to issue them an intellectual and spiritual wake-up call:

> Ding a' their trumpery show to blauds again.
> Their measure is the thimblefu' o' Esk in spate.
> Like whisky the tittlin' craturs mete oot your poo'ers
> Aince a week for bawbees in the kirk-door plate,
> – And pit their umbrellas up when they come oot
> If mair than a pulpitfu' o' You's aboot![189]

MacDiarmid emphasizes the spiritual parsimony of the Langholm congregation before asking God to move beyond this locality and 'flush the world in earnest'.[190] He continues the religious theme in 'Charisma and My Relatives', comparing himself to the Christ who transcends family relations. This poem is dedicated to William McElroy, the man Peggy left MacDiarmid for. McElroy made his living as an iron and coal merchant. It must have been a bitter irony for MacDiarmid, who had been radically involved in politics in provincial Montrose – a place that Peggy felt restricted in – that McElroy grew rich 'from the sale of slag abandoned around the coal-mines closed in the General Strike in 1926'.[191] The poem's attack on Christianity makes it a precursor of the radical spiritual individualism of 'Ode to All Rebels'. MacDiarmid claims that 'naewhere has the love-religion had / A harder struggle than in Scotland',

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[189] *CP1*, p. 299 ('Prayer for a Second Flood').
[190] *CP1*, p. 300.
[191] Editor's 'Appendix: Biographical List of Recipients', *NSL*, p. 549.

an idea echoed in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*.[192] At this difficult time in MacDiarmid's personal life, he calls upon the fighting Border spirit:

> We've focht in a' the sham fechts o' the world.
> But I'm a Borderer and at last in me
> The spirit o' my people's no' content
> Wi' ony but the greatest enemy,
> And nae mair plays at sodgers but has won
> To a live battle-grun'.[193]

Who or what is 'the greatest enemy'? Clearly not McElroy and the transient, human squabbles of the present. Is it the Christian God, perhaps? Or is it the self-divided poet himself – 'Oorsels oor greatest foes' – who impoverishes his spirit with the very identity markers that he has called on to assist him in the fight:

> I haud to 'I' and 'Scot' and 'Borderer'
> And fence the wondrous fire that in me's lit
> Wi' sicna barriers roond as hide frae'ts licht
> Near a'body's sicht'.[194]

Clearly MacDiarmid's grief over the loss of Peggy and the children, a hurt that was to resound through his letters for much of the 1930s, precipitated a crisis of identity that called him back imaginatively to his past in Langholm and the Borders as he sought to find emotional resources with which to cope with the alienation of the present. However, his reflections on his formative years are tinged with the bitterness of his adult personal life:

> The pairts o' Langholm the Esk reflects
> Seem like maist women, better than they are[195]

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[192] For example, Chris says to her brother Will in *Sunset Song* (1932): '*I don't believe they were ever religious, the Scots folk, Will – not really religious like Irish or French or all the rest in the history books. They've never BELIEVED. It's just been a place to collect and argue, the kirk, and criticise God*', similarly, Robert Colquohoun, Chris's husband in *Cloud Howe* (1933), says: 'Religion – *A Scot know religion? Half of them think of God as a Scot with brosy morals and a penchant for Burns. And the other half are over damned mean to allow the Almighty even existence*', Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair* (London: Penguin, 1986; 1946), pp. 165, 295.
[193] *CP1*, p. 301 ('Charisma and My Relatives').
[194] *CP1*, p. 302.
[195] *CP1*, p. 306 ('The Liquid Light').

His resentful feelings about personal love are coincident with his desire to destroy religion in general ('Religion and Love') and Presbyterianism in particular ('The Church of My Fathers'). Perhaps, as he embraced a spiritualized communism, this phase represents the point at which MacDiarmid attempted to finally annul the effects of his childhood faith. In attempting to 'breach' the wall of familial conformity he again calls upon the fighting spirit of the Borderer, asking if 'You're a fechter tae?' and stating 'We're sodgers'.[196] In 'Another Turn of the Screw' the poet's memory, both literal and ancestral, seems to be slipping, leaving him face-to-face with nothingness, but again he summons his Border identity to fight the abyss: 'Fear? What's fear to a Border man?'.[197] For all his fighting talk, MacDiarmid was in bad psychological and physical shape at this point. His family has left him and the crisis this instigates renders nugatory the Christian ethos of his forebears, even as their collective spiritual indomitableness still resides in the poet. As MacDiarmid says in 'Kinsfolk', 'I've sprung / Frae battles, mair than ballads', his 'thrawn auld' lineage extending from 'Reivers to weavers and to me'.[198] Unable to will his personal life back into the shape he wants, MacDiarmid's faith comes to rest on the adamantine, impersonal will of communism, 'the flower and iron of the truth'.[199]

MacDiarmid describes himself in *Lucky Poet* as 'an absolutist whose absolutes came to grief in his private life', but a psychological analysis (a theoretical one shall be attempted in Chapter Three of this thesis) suggests that subjective unhappiness may have helped propel him towards the replacement religion of communism.[200] MacDiarmid fuses his internationalist marxist politics with the local Langholm scene

[196] *CP1*, p. 309 ('The Hole in the Wall').
[197] *CP1*, p. 310 ('Another Turn of the Screw').
[198] *CP2*, p. 1150 ('Kinsfolk').
[199] *CP1*, p. 298 ('First Hymn to Lenin').
[200] *LP*, p. 44.

in 'The Seamless Garment', admitting that it is only recently that he has begun to think about the working environment of his home town:

> You are a cousin of mine
> Here in the mill.
> It's queer that born in the Langholm
> It's no' until
> Juist noo I see what it means
> To work in the mill like my freen's.[201]

This attempt to weld modernist aesthetics with political commitment to communism can be patronizing, the elitist implication being that the 'fricitive work' of the unacknowledged legislators is more important than the manual work of the mill workers.[202] However, Harvey Oxenhorn's point that a failing of 'The Seamless Garment' lies in the provinciality of its setting implies that the working conditions of those in small towns such as Langholm are less important than great centres of 'mass industrial and political conflict' such as 'Lenin's Petersburg, Rosa Luxembourg's Berlin – or the Glasgow of John MacLean'.[203] It is just such insular metropolitanism that MacDiarmid's Maclean-inspired Scottish Republican politics of place seeks to radically counter with an internationalist politics set in a local milieu.

The collection ends with a poem dedicated to beginnings, Life itself and the poet's own origin in Langholm. 'Water of Life' is one of a number of MacDiarmid's water poems – 'Water Music', 'Tarras', 'The Point of Honour', 'By Wauchopside', 'The Dog Pool' and, already mentioned, 'The Liquid Light' and 'Prayer for a Second Flood' – inspired by the River Esk and the Water of Ewes and Wauchope, all in and around Langholm. Consistent with its mention and use of imagery of the Flood –

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[201] *CP1*, p. 311 ('The Seamless Garment').
[202] *CP1*, p. 314.
[203] Harvey Oxenhorn, *Elemental Things: The Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), p. 136.

'Wha looks on water and's no' affected yet / By memories o' the Flood' – this is another poem that demonstrates the flux in which the poet's life is moving at this time:

> Happy wha feels there's solid ground beneath
> His feet at ony time – if ony does.
> Happy? That's aiblins ga'en a bit ower faur.
> I only mean he differs frae me thus
> Tho' I'm whiles glad when a less shoogly sea
> Than ithers cradles me.[204]

The emotional trauma of his break from his family has taken the ground from under the poet's feet. Perhaps also the movement from the small-town Scotland of Montrose to metropolitan London in 1930 may have disturbed MacDiarmid's sense of creative self and sent him back imaginatively to Langholm where he played as a boy – 'A perfect maze / O' waters is aboot the Muckle Toon' – a memory that enables him to swim in the sea of his current troubles: 'I was sae used to waters as a loon / That I'm amphibious still'.[205]

His world turned upside down and shaken as he is by his experiences, the poet begins to be positive about the shift to fundamentals implicit in facing life alone, both emotionally and metaphysically:

> Nae gulfs that open 'neath oor feet'll find
> Us hailly at a loss if we just keep
> The perspective the deluge should ha' gien's
> And if we dinna, or if they're mair deep
> Than even that is muckle guidance in,
> It's there altho' we're blin'.[206]

Couched as the poem is in religious imagery, this seeking for 'guidance' in 'the deluge' could imply a religious attitude. However, the poet believes that the next Flood will be of revolutionary importance, 'A salutary process bringin' values oot /

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[204] *CP1*, p. 314 ('Water of Life').
[205] Ibid.
[206] *CP1*, p. 316.

Ocht less 'ud leave in doot'.[207] Without the austerely regenerating East wind of international communism the local environment remains mired in parochialism and we are faced with the 'Extinction' of human progress: 'What's that but to return / To juist anither Muckle Toon again?'.[208] Having reached the end, MacDiarmid seeks in the beginning of things, his life in Langholm and all of Life, a means to a new set of values through which to understand and confront existence: 'what I personally owed to the Langholm of that time was an out-and-out Radicalism and Republicanism'.[209] His international communism is the apotheosis of this spiritual evolution and emerges from his imaginative re-immersion in his local Langholm boyhood and the debatable land of the Scottish Borders, his attempt to transcend its churchy parochialism and so transform the values and politics of this place. As the next chapter shows, MacDiarmid's provincial universalism was to be reborn in another 'wee Nazareth' in Angus, north-east Scotland.[210]

[207] *CP1*, p. 317 ('Water of Life').
[208] Ibid.
[209] *LP*, p. 225.
[210] *CP2*, p. 1424 ('The Borders').

Chapter 2 A DISGRACE TO THE COMMUNITY

> Model of the preference of quality to quantity
> Montrose set here between the hills and the sea
> On its tongue of land is a perfect example
> Of multum in parvo – Earth's best in epitome.[1]

The spiritual communism of MacDiarmid's radical Scottish Republican politics of place may be rooted in his wish to transcend the circumscriptive Calvinism of Langholm in the Scottish Borders, but it is to the north-eastern coastal town of Montrose that we must look to find his metaphysical Scottish nationalism first being practised. Christopher Murray Grieve lived in Montrose for most of the 1920s. It was here in 1922, a pivotal year for literary modernism with the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*, that Grieve invented the pseudonym Hugh MacDiarmid. In Montrose he wrote the masterly Scots lyrics of *Sangschaw* (1925), *Penny Wheep* (1926) and *The Lucky Bag* (1927), as well as his own modernist epic *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926). It was also from Montrose that MacDiarmid began the task which his *alter ego* Grieve had set for him whilst serving with the Royal Army Medical Corps in Macedonia and Salonika during the First World War: the internationalization of a provincialized Scottish cultural and political scene.

This chapter will look at MacDiarmid's time in Montrose, examining uncollected material from the *Montrose Review* – from which it will quote at length – and the *Montrose Standard*, to argue that MacDiarmid's modernist poetry in Scots and his internationalist political activities on a local and national level are valuably stimulated by his daily engagement with the Montrose community, principally through his work as a journalist and councillor in the town:

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[1] *CP2*, p. 1407 ('Montrose').

> all my best early poetry was written when I was holding down an exacting journalistic post and at the same time functioning as a Town Councillor, Parish Councillor, member of the Education Authority, and a Magistrate[2]

If Chapter One, and the thesis as a whole, argues for the importance of the symbiotic relationship between nationalism and internationalism in MacDiarmid's work, this chapter illustrates how major modernist poetry and a national political and cultural movement with internationalist designs issues from a provincial setting. MacDiarmid wished his epitaph to be 'A disgrace to the community', but his politics of place in Montrose display a dedicated striving to serve and radically transform the town in which he lived.[3]

Many other famous writers have associations with Montrose. Andrew Melville, one of the founders of Scottish Presbyterianism, was born near Montrose in 1545 and was educated at Montrose Grammar School. He wrote the *Second Book of Discipline* and various works of poetry in Latin. James Graham, the Marquis of Montrose, was born in the town in 1612. A general and poet, Graham wrote his most famous poem 'His Metrical Prayer (On the Eve of his own Execution)' after being imprisoned and sentenced to death in 1650. A figure much mentioned in the *Montrose Review* at the time MacDiarmid was writing for the newspaper was the lawyer and writer George Beattie who was born at the Hill of Morphie on the North Esk in 1786. His long poem 'Jock o' Arnha', inspired by Burns's 'Tam o' Shanter', may have influenced MacDiarmid in the writing of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*.[4] Beattie shot himself on a beach near St Cyrus in 1823. Contemporaneous with MacDiarmid, Violet Jacob, born at the House of Dun by Montrose in 1863, set work such as *Flemington* (1911) and *Songs of Angus* (1915) in and around Montrose. Willa Muir, born Wilhelmina

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[2] *Company*, p. 26.
[3] *LP*, p. 426.
[4] See Robert Crawford, 'MacDiarmid in Montrose', *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry*, ed. Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 48-9.

Anderson in Montrose in 1890, fictionalizes Montrose in her novel *Imagined Corners* (1931). Another leading figure in the Scottish Renaissance movement was the novelist Fionn Mac Colla, born Tom MacDonald in Montrose in 1906.

The purpose of listing these famous Montrosians is to illustrate one of the central points of this thesis: that important figures in the life of the nation need neither issue from nor live in the literary centre, metropolitanism being 'a false culture due to the Metropolis's misinterpretation of its proper relationship to the rest of the country'.[5] Small-town Scotland is largely associated in the literary imagination with the kailyard of Barrie's couthie Thrums and its nightmarish antithesis, George Douglas Brown's Barbie. MacDiarmid's radical politics of place ideologically oppose the parochial and sectarian values of Andrew McPherson's idea of the Barrie-inspired 'Kirriemuir career' – which argues that in Scotland 'the locus of social identity has indeed been that of the village or the small town', particularly in largely Protestant east-coast areas such as Angus – yet in his life MacDiarmid clung to, poetically prospered in and theoretically defended small-town Scotland.[6] Writing in 1933, MacDiarmid saw 'the foremost place Angus holds in the new stirrings in Scottish letters', his decade in Montrose in the 1920s being of especial significance in his synthetical efforts towards a new internationalist Scotland.[7]

MacDiarmid had two spells in Montrose. He was demobilized in the summer of 1919 and went to live in St Andrews where his first wife Margaret (or Peggy) was living. From the university town – an anglicized place disliked by MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir, but central in the thirties to James Whyte's pluralistic nationalist conception of the modern Scot – MacDiarmid found employment as a reporter in

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[5] *RT2*, p. 251 ('The Destiny of Cities').
[6] Andrew McPherson, 'An Angle on the Geist: Persistence and Change in the Scottish Educational Tradition', *Scottish Culture and Education 1800-1980*, ed. Walter M. Humes and Hamish M. Paterson (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983), p. 218.
[7] *RT2*, p. 390 ('Literary Angus and the Mearns').

Montrose with the *Montrose Review*. He left his first stint in Montrose in October 1920. According to Catherine Kerrigan, on 6 October he started work as

> a teacher to two daughters of the head stalker of Kildermorie Forest, located on a private estate near Alness which is a village ten miles north-east of Dingwall in Easter Ross. He was to remain there until 26 April 1921.[8]

MacDiarmid rejoined the *Montrose Review* in April 1921 – a job he had previously found to be so time-consuming it had a deleterious effect on his creative activity – because of the offer of increased wages of £3 a week.[9] On return to the town, MacDiarmid and his wife moved into the first of three addresses they were to occupy in Montrose, 19 Kincardine Street. From the MacDiarmid – Ogilvie letters we can see that by 8 September of that same year the couple had moved to 12 White's Place. The last house they were to occupy in Montrose was 16 Links Avenue, which they moved to on 17 March 1922.

His job for the *Montrose Review* wasn't the first time MacDiarmid had worked as a journalist and his contribution to various different newspapers accounts for a very sizeable proportion of his published prose output. His first post was with the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, which he joined in January 1911 when he was eighteen years old. It was during his seven-month spell with the Edinburgh paper that MacDiarmid's first article for A.R. Orage's *New Age* appeared. Entitled 'The Young Astrology', MacDiarmid's piece is interesting in that it signals, even at this early stage, a concern with scientific matters (if of a dubious nature) and an attempt to place human life, or at least that of genius, as part of a bigger metaphysical picture. Such ideas were to resound throughout the poet's career and the cosmological view plays a crucial part in the appeal of his early Scots lyrics. 'The Young Astrology' is also

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[8] Catherine Kerrigan, ed., *Hugh MacDiarmid – George Ogilvie Letters* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), p. 53.
[9] See Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 119.

important as the inception of MacDiarmid's intellectually fruitful relationship with the *New Age*, which Orage took control of in 1907 and which MacDiarmid described as 'the most brilliant journal that has ever been written in English'.[10] It was from the pages of this internationalist journal that MacDiarmid drew the inspiration for the concurrence of spiritual and material concerns that is the very essence of his poetry. Such eclectically highbrow ideas would then be reintroduced at local level through the pages of the numerous provincial newspapers for which MacDiarmid worked. This was a tactic he pursued with the Monmouthshire *Labour News* and, perhaps not surprisingly, it cost him his job there. But such attempts to manipulate the general tenor of the newspaper to his own ends were something MacDiarmid became more adroit at. This is evident in the pages of the *Montrose Review*.

Established in 1811, the *Montrose Review* is one of the oldest weekly newspapers in Scotland. At the time MacDiarmid worked there this eight-page Liberal newspaper would appear every Friday. Like most provincial papers, it attempted to fuse mainly local concerns with reports of the most significant national and international events. MacDiarmid's job at the *Review* was that of editor-reporter. According to Alan Bold, this meant that MacDiarmid 'wrote most of the contents'.[11] Tempting as this may be to believe, particularly when examining the paper in search of MacDiarmid's weekly contributions and believing his pen can be discerned on every page, the very structure of the *Review* and indeed all newspapers – wherein particular subject areas are assigned to individuals with the requisite knowledge and experience – makes it unlikely. It would be a surprise indeed if MacDiarmid were found to be the author of the weekly round up of farming news, 'Poultry Notes'. This is not to be facetious, nor attempt to undermine the myth of massive MacDiarmidian

[10] MacDiarmid, quoted in Catherine Kerrigan, *Whaur Extremes Meet: The Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid 1920-1934* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1983), p. 27.
[11] Bold, *MacDiarmid*, p. 120.

energy in Montrose, but simply to point out that MacDiarmid's increased artistic and political activity would be inconceivable without a decrease in the kind of journalistic hack-work he performed for *Clydebank and Renfrew Press*, for instance.

The most obvious difficulty in attempting to identify MacDiarmid's contribution to the *Montrose Review* and the *Montrose Standard* is the anonymity of the articles. Although some pieces in the *Review* have satirical pen names in keeping with the witty nature of the subject matter of this or that particular article, most of the more serious reportage is unsigned. Looking firstly at some of the more amusing pieces in the paper, it is tempting to say that MacDiarmid wrote them. Two articles from the *Review* of 20 February 1920, for instance, make interesting reading. Firstly, 'Smashing The Competitive System' by Wilfred Crouch which tells us that

1. Co-operation is better than competition.
2. Unity is better than discord.
3. The community is of more value than the individual.[12]

Ideas such as these certainly chime with MacDiarmid's international socialism, but they do not sit easily with his extreme creative individualism. And what are we to make of the writer's surname? Does 'Crouch' signify someone with their ear to the ground, in touch with contemporary international ideas just three years after the Russian Revolution? Or is the name satirizing the ideology of one bowed under the weight of a communitarian ethic?

An article entitled 'Always The Same' from the *Review* on that same day raises similar questions. Written by someone calling themselves Bafon Witz, it is a humorous feature objecting to communism in the conservatively parochial vein: that the leaders live in luxury while the masses merely subsist, and that it will never work because human nature remains 'always the same':

[12] *Montrose Review*, 20 February 1920, p. 2.

> They had everything equal to the best that the most bloated, wealthy and hated Englisher of the middle class could provide for himself. And of course many of their followers had to live bare so that Marx and Engels could flourish in style.[13]

The name Bafon Witz may suggest a rubbishing of communism, but it could also express the idiocy of the writer's ideas and a ridiculing of the intellectual powers of those who share the opinions expressed in the article.

MacDiarmid made a habit throughout his writing career, and also in his practical and political engagement with place – Langholm, Montrose, Whalsay, Scotland – of engaging with the life of the community and propounding internationalist ideas that seek to change the fundamentals of that community's relations, while at the same time offensively objecting to the damaging provincialism of outlook of the community in which he lived. This dualistic stance is expressed in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* where the drunk man's attitude to the mass of his own townsfolk can be patronizing and elitist:

> And in the toon that I belang tae
> – What tho'ts Montrose or Nazareth? –
> Helplessly the folk continue
> To lead their livin' death!...[14]

This may suggest that the philistine masses are creatively sterile wherever they live. If Christianity has failed to change human nature for the better even in Nazareth then what hope can the visionary poet have in the folk of Montrose? However, it may also imply that provincial Montrose potentially has the world-historical importance of the birthplace of Christ. The double-edged nature of MacDiarmid's elitism is discussed more fully in Chapter Five of this thesis. However, as we learned in Chapter One regarding his seemingly paradoxical attitude to Langholm, MacDiarmid's politics of

[13] *Montrose Review*, 20 February 1920, p. 8.
[14] *CP1*, p. 88 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).

place may sometimes appear scornful, but only through anger at the squandering of the radical evolutionary possibilities inherent in the peripheries.

In articles with a more serious tone appearing in the *Review* the same problems of identification abound. This means that MacDiarmid's hand can only be discerned by what must pass for educated guesswork. Such conjecture as to the possibility of an article being by MacDiarmid revolves around the subject matter, the tone of the piece and its ideas. A good example may be drawn from the *Montrose Review* of 1920 and an ongoing debate as to where a war memorial should be situated in the town. During these fairly mundane arguments a more serious article appears in the *Review* on 20 February entitled 'Montrose War Memorial', signed 'By An Ex-Soldier'. MacDiarmid did serve (as a non-combatant) in the First World War, but other journalists working for the paper doubtless also did so. What is more telling perhaps is the angry, polemical tone of the piece and its concern for social justice. Complaining about council members who are willing to spend £2500 of public money on a statue, but who only pay £2 a week to service-pensioners, the article goes on:

> The fact that the leading spirits in the movement saw no military service themselves; that many of them belong to that generation for whose political mistakes many of the younger generation had to perish, and that even so they learned nothing; that these men are precisely the men who will erect memorials to the dead and do nothing to alleviate the hardships of the living; and that this proposal to spend £2500 on a war memorial comes at a time when in Montrose alone many ex-soldiers are placed in cruel constraints of circumstance [...] all these are anomalies which, however, desceditable [*sic*] to these individuals do not alter the fact that a memorial to the fallen is desirable.[15]

The socialistic impulse of this piece and its desire to expose the hypocrisy of the town elders is a prefiguration of the episode in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Cloud Howe* (1933) concerning the erection of an angel-crowned war memorial in poverty-ridden Segget. The above article may or may not be the work of MacDiarmid but the international

[15] *Montrose Review*, 20 February 1920, p. 7.

socialist ideals it expresses run like a red thread through his local activities in provincial Montrose.

As Chapter One of this thesis illustrates, Langholm may have been the seedbed of MacDiarmid's spiritual communism, but it is in Montrose that he brings such internationalist ideas to radical fruition. In 1920 (the year in which the CPGB was founded) at a weekly meeting of the Montrose branch of the ILP in Scott's Hall, C.M. Grieve gave a lecture on 'Lenin – The Man and His Message and Methods'.[16] One of the main themes that emerge from the *Montrose Review* is the consistency of purpose in MacDiarmid's politics. This interest in Leninism precedes by more than a decade the writing of the *First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* (1931) and suggests that W.N. Herbert is correct in his thesis 'that MacDiarmid's work displays at every stage of its complex progress a continuity of vision'.[17] It also illustrates the intricate interactions between MacDiarmid's work as a poet, journalist and political activist. The early lyrics published during MacDiarmid's period in Montrose are not explicitly political in content. However, as we shall see, they are politically charged through their use of Scots as a linguistic medium, a local politics of language that reinforces MacDiarmid's political activity in the community in its dynamic commitment to commingling the local, the national and the international.

MacDiarmid did not give theoretical voice to his radical Scottish Republican politics of place until the thirties in Whalsay. Yet in Scottish Renaissance Montrose in the 1920s this unity of local and universal is also present, the poet synchronizing an incipient Scottish nationalism with a theoretical international communism, doing so while actively engaged (until 1925) as a local independent councillor of markedly socialist bearings. It would be impossible to fathom the influences that brought about

[16] *Montrose Review*, 13 February 1920, p. 5.
[17] W.N. Herbert, *To Circumjack MacDiarmid: The Poetry and Prose of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. xi.

the great explosion of energy that characterizes MacDiarmid's time in Montrose. But his decade in the town and his closeness to the mainspring of the life of the community through his work as a journalist and councillor, proved to be a major source of poetic inspiration:

> for many years I was a newspaper reporter and on weekly local papers at that. I preferred these because in that way one is involved in every element of a community's life and gets to know practically everybody in the area in question. That was certainly the case with me in Clydebank, Ebbw Vale, Cupar-Fife, Forfar, and finally Montrose.[18]

MacDiarmid's political activities in Montrose can be seen in three distinct areas that effectively and ingeniously he managed to interrelate. Firstly, the poetry written in Scots is the creatively manifested mainspring of the cultural and political ideas that MacDiarmid propagandized through the pages of various periodicals such as the *Scottish Nation* and in the *Montrose Review*. Such journalism represents the second level of MacDiarmid's industrious push for political and cultural change in Scotland. Throughout 1923 the *Montrose Review* carried syndicated articles from the short-lived *Scottish Nation*, a literary, cultural and political journal devoted to Scottish interests that MacDiarmid helped to establish in that year. Other journals, such as the *Scottish Chapbook*, the *Northern Review* and *Northern Numbers*, were all used to further MacDiarmid's propaganda programme for Scottish political and cultural renaissance and indicate the commitment to aligning the nation with modern international perspectives, doing so from a provincial setting.

Another way in which he boosted these concerns in the *Montrose Review* was to comment on his own activities in a different section of the newspaper. For instance, in 'Round the Town' from 25 May 1923 we have a writer, probably MacDiarmid, congratulating C.M. Grieve on the *Scottish Nation*:

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[18] *Company*, p. 24.

> It is inconceivable that Scotsmen and Scotswomen will not welcome their new weekly. By all the tokens, it is assured of such a vigorous measure of support as will give it a long and healthy life and so reward the public spirit and enterprise of its promoters. No one who believes that mind is greater than matter can afford to miss a copy of 'The Scottish Nation' – if for nothing else than the fact of its promise of forcing the pace in the strife to compel an unrepresentative Parliament in which an alien, although neighbouring country is a 'Predominant' partner to hand over to Scotland her right to manage Scottish affairs in her distinctively Scottish manner.[19]

Such self-promotion must have been invaluable when launching an intellectual journal that would have to struggle to win readers. MacDiarmid also contributed to the correspondence columns of both the *Montrose Review* and the *Montrose Standard*, signing himself C.M. Grieve and writing on local and national political matters.

The third area in which MacDiarmid was politically active in Montrose was as a councillor. He began working for Montrose Town Council on 13 March 1922 on a provisional basis 'to fill a vacancy caused by resignation'.[20] In November of that same year, C.M. Grieve sought the votes of the people of Montrose in the Municipal Election with this address in the *Montrose Review*:

> Journalism rightly-conceived is a training in the understanding of public affairs and in the formulation and expression of opinion. Journalists have rendered public service to Montrose before. Having been requested to stand for the Town Council, it will be my earnest endeavour, if returned, to worthily follow these precedents. I am opposed to 'secret diplomacy' in public affairs. I believe that no work should be sent out of the town which can possibly be allocated locally, and that the Council should do all in its power to increase local prosperity and relieve unemployment. A negative policy of economy is not enough. A forward policy is needed, and, in the initiation and carrying-out of such, the services of a young man may be useful. Ability and public spirit are not the monopolies of the elderly. I do not believe that a caucus can fairly represent the electorate, and foresee danger to the public interest if this caucus secures a majority in the reduced Council. I respectfully solicit the suffrages of those who, aware of the grave issues confronting local authorities in these troublous times appreciate the need not only for men who are not afraid to speak their minds (except in Committee), but who actually have minds to speak.[21]

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[19] *Montrose Review*, 25 May 1923, p. 5.
[20] Bold, *MacDiarmid*, p. 130.
[21] *Montrose Review*, 3 November 1922, p. 4.

MacDiarmid the budding young local politician shows an understanding of the importance of his journalistic work to a knowledge of and commitment to community affairs. In a record poll he gained 1,279 votes.

In Montrose, MacDiarmid was a successful local politician, in contrast to his attempts to shine on the national stage against such as Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home in 1964, and his repeated failure to win university rectorships. In the appointment of the office-bearers for Montrose Town Council, Councillor Grieve was selected to work on several committees: the Water Committee; Dorward's House of Refuge Representatives; he was the lone council representative on the Montrose School Management Committee; and he served on the Public Library Committee. MacDiarmid would long remember himself as 'the only Socialist Town Councillor in Montrose'.[22] According to Trevor Johns, however, MacDiarmid denied 'that he was standing as a Socialist. He admitted that he was a Socialist, but was not standing as an official Socialist candidate: he was an Independent'.[23] MacDiarmid certainly exemplified a Burnsian independence of mind in his work as a local councillor.

If we look more closely into MacDiarmid's work as a councillor in Montrose we find that his actions and pronouncements give the lie to his own (borrowed) statement about his socialism that he was 'interested only in a very subordinate way in the politics of Socialism as a political theory; my real concern with Socialism is an artist's organized approach to the interdependencies of life'.[24] So writes the spiritual communist of *Lucky Poet*, a book published under pressure of war in 1943 but written during the 1930s in the isolation of 'the little island of Whalsay in the north-east of the Shetland archipelago'.[25] The sometimes alienated extremism of MacDiarmid's thirties

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[22] *Company*, p. 158.
[23] Trevor W. Johns, 'MacDiarmid the Montrosian', *Montrose Review*, 17 April 1986, p. 14.
[24] *LP*, p. 241; Buthlay tells us that this footnote form *Lucky Poet* 'is an unacknowledged quotation from Lincoln Kirstein, writing about Gaudier-Brzeska', *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, ed. Kenneth Buthlay (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 91.
[25] *LP*, p. xi.

communism will be examined in Chapter Three. However, from the *Montrose Review* throughout the 1920s we find a consistent engagement with a more practical, realistic and local socialist politics, both in the council chamber and in public lectures and debates round the town.

A good example comes from a letter Grieve sent to the correspondence column of the *Montrose Review* of 23 February 1923. Entitled 'Proposed Wage Cuts', the letter rails against 'reduction in the wages of officials and workmen' in the town, Grieve's pronouncements amounting to the now unfashionable idea of class war:

> The argument that such reductions in the remuneration of public employees are made in the interests of the ratepayers is entirely specious, and will not bear a moment's consideration. The present trade depression and widespread unemployment are mainly due to the reduction in the workers' purchasing power caused by wage-cuts [...] No section of workers can have their wages reduced without endangering the standard of living of their fellows. Each wage-cut anywhere is triumphantly cited by employers and employing authorities elsewhere as a reason for further and further cuts, and so the vicious circle is kept going round.[26]

Councillor Grieve again drew attention to the wages question at the monthly meeting of Montrose Town Council on Monday 14 May 1923. He protested against the inadequate wage of full-time employees saying, 'It was simply a starvation wage, and the Council was not justified in taking advantage of [the] unemployed in this way'.[27] The 'Round The Town' section of the *Montrose Review* for 16 March had also commented on the unfairness of the wage reductions. This may be MacDiarmid getting his point across in another area of the newspaper:

> The implication is that in the matter of wages and hours, the Town Council should set a standard higher than the private employer. In practice that would mean the creation of a privileged class whose emoluments were paid out of a fund contributed to by the less fortunate employees of private firms. But it is quite legitimate to hold that the town ought to be a fair and considerate employer shunning all hard or sharp practices.[28]

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[26] *Montrose Review*, 23 February 1923, p. 4.
[27] *Montrose Review*, 18 May 1923, p. 6.
[28] *Montrose Review*, 16 March 1923, p. 5.

The examples cited above show a MacDiarmid comfortably immersed in the minutiae of local politics, clear in the understanding that the local is the universal. In contradistinction to the fraudulent aura given off by some of the later work like *Lucky Poet* (1943), MacDiarmid's political convictions in the twenties ring true. His socialistic local concerns certainly make happier reading that the more theoretical statements of grand design that were to follow as his career progressed. This is what Robert Crawford means when he says:

> MacDiarmid's liberating remoteness from metropolitan power developed a sense of marginal vulnerability that led to over-compensatory harangues; this pattern would be exacerbated by his later residence in Whalsay. Yet, crucially, Montrose allowed MacDiarmid both to maintain contact with international literary developments, and to keep faith with the peculiar grain of Scottish and minutely local affairs.[29]

However, even in Montrose MacDiarmid refused to compromise a socialism that he saw as a route to greater universal spiritual fulfillment.

At an ILP meeting at the Co-operative Hall in Montrose on Sunday 13 January 1924, Hospital-Master Grieve gave a lecture on 'The Dangers of Moderation', a typically MacDiarmidian stance. A *Montrose Review* report of 18 January, perhaps written by MacDiarmid, gives an outline of the poet's political ideas:

> Mr Grieve said that they were diluting their principles and modifying their demands in a fashion that could have only one result – the stultification of their movement. They might gain social reforms very valuable in themselves, but that had nothing to do with their objective, which was the realisation of Socialism. If as a consequence of moderation, by means of better wages and conditions generally, they raised the working classes to conditions of comfort equal to those at present enjoyed by the middle classes, and, so merely changed the proletariat into a bourgeosie [*sic*] he would regard it as the greatest catastrophe in history. He regarded a Trade Unionist who voted Labour, but was not a Socialist, as a more dangerous enemy than the die-hard Tory. Mr Grieve concluded by reading some of the scathing social satires from Mr Osbert Sitwell's 'Out of the Flame' and poignant verses from Richard Dehmel, the German Socialist poet.[30]

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[29] Crawford, 'MacDiarmid in Montrose', *Locations of Literary Modernism*, p. 56.
[30] *Montrose Review*, 18 January 1924, p. 3.

It is doubtful that 'the working classes' would agree with MacDiarmid that an increase in material prosperity is disastrous, but his attempt to introduce international and intellectual socialist concerns within a local, small-town domain not noted for radicalism is courageously characteristic of MacDiarmid's politics of place in Montrose.

Another way in which MacDiarmid managed to combine his socialist commitment to a particular locality with a sense of responsibility for the global was through his participation in the Montrose branch of the League of Nations. As Secretary of the League of Nations Union, MacDiarmid attended an open-air 'No More War' demonstration at the Town House in Montrose on Friday 10 August 1923.[31] From the *Montrose Review* of 17 August we read that Councillor Grieve was appalled at the 'extraordinary lethargy' shown in Montrose toward the aims of the League.[32] Having been formed the previous winter, the local branch still had only thirty members, whereas the less populous Ferryden had over sixty members. In the words of the *Review* writer, possibly MacDiarmid, Grieve then proceeds to lambast the 'Christian Churches':

> They had cut a sorry figure during the last War when they manifested themselves as mere 'blind leaders of the blind', impotent to give any message to the stricken peoples. If that was all that the Christian Churches could do after 2000 years of advocacy of Christianity, they might as well resign themselves to the continuance of war and the destruction of civilization and Christianity.[33]

It is apposite that MacDiarmid should have criticized religious involvement in the League of Nations Union so soon after he joined the organization. Six months later, on Friday 8 February 1924, MacDiarmid resigned from his offices as Secretary and Treasurer because he was no longer prepared to work with what he saw as the

[31] Bold incorrectly gives the date of this meeting as August 1922 in *MacDiarmid*, p. 133.
[32] *Montrose Review*, 17 August 1923, p. 7.
[33] Ibid.

implacably conservative local churches. At this time, he was also beginning to write a metaphysical Scots poetry that would challenge the Christian view of the universe.

International concerns were again on MacDiarmid's agenda when at a meeting of the local branch of the ILP in the Montrose Albert Hall on Sunday 25 March 1927, Mr C.M. Grieve J.P. gave a talk entitled 'Europe and Asia' wherein 'he contended that we must abandon the idea of maintaining the predominancy of the white race. He regarded Soviet Russia as a means of bridging the gulf between East and West'.[34] This signifies the East-West synthesis, first introduced in *A Drunk Man* and reprised in the Gaelic Idea of *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, which will challenge the imperialistic hold of metropolitan Anglo-Saxondom through a provincialist assertion of the universal value of cultural and political difference. What is noteworthy, however, is that MacDiarmid is as keen to propound such abstractly internationalist ideas at the local level as he is to incorporate them into his Scots poetry.

Poetry, journalism and political work constantly criss-cross in such interesting ways in MacDiarmid's period in Montrose. An excellent example of this comes in a talk he gave on 17 February 1924:

> VISTAS OF SCIENCE – Hospitalmaster Grieve is to address Montrose Brotherhood in the Y.M.C.A. Institute on Sunday afternoon, when he will deal with the great discoveries which have recently revolutionised scientific thought – relativity, the Bohr-Rutherford theory of atoms, etc. – and relate these to the individual outlook in general, and to religious belief in particular.[35]

Coming in 1924, the preoccupations of this 'Vistas of Science' lecture predate by some considerable time the use of scientific vocabulary in MacDiarmid's later poetry of facts. However, this address was made only one year before the appearance of the modernist metaphysics of his first collection of poetry in Scots.

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[34] *Montrose Review*, 1 April 1927, p. 5.
[35] *Montrose Review*, 15 February 1924, p. 5.

Many of the poems in *Sangschaw* (1925) and *Penny Wheep* (1926) adopt a cosmological viewpoint of the universe and suggest a Creation from which God has mysteriously withdrawn, leaving only small traces and clues to be discerned through the spiritually penetrating 'keethin' sicht' of the Scots lyrics:

> But mebbe yet the hert o' a man
> When it feels the twist in its quick
> O' the link that binds it to ilka life,
> A'e stab in the nerves o' the stars,
> 'll raise a cry that'll fetch God back
> To the hert o' His wark again?
> – Though Nature and Man ha'e cried in vain
> Rent in unendin' wars![36]

Chambers Dictionary defines the cosmological as 'according to the cosmology of general relativity, the principle that, at a given time, the universe would look the same to observers in other nebulae as it looks to us'.[37] Such a theory is at work in 'The Innumerable Christ':

> I' mony an unco warl' the nicht
> The lift gaes black as pitch at noon,
> An' sideways on their chests the heids
> O' endless Christs roll doon.[38]

What MacDiarmid seems intent on doing in these early Scots lyrics is undermining the Christian idea that God is central to the purpose of the universe, so clearing the way for the historical destiny of the essential metaphysical Scotland to be revealed by the poet-saviour of the irrationalist *A Drunk Man* and *To Circumjack Cencrastus.*

'Ballad of the Five Senses' is similar to 'The Innumerable Christ' in its attempt to decentre the Christian subject and open up new ways of seeing. Perceiving 'wi' his

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[36] *CP1*, p. 25 ('Au Clair de la Lune'); p. 50 ('Sea-Serpent').
[37] *The Chambers Dictionary*, ed. Sandra Anderson and others (Edinburgh: Chambers, 2000; 1998), p. 369.
[38] *CP1*, p. 32 ('The Innumerable Christ').

senses five' the 'bonny warl' / That lies fornenst a' men', the balladeer understands that to see God he must move beyond the material and sensual:

> Oot o' the way, my senses five,
> I ken a' you can tell,
> Oot o' the way, my thochts, for noo'
> I maun face God mysel'.[39]

The idea that the poet must face God alone with no material intermediaries is a reminder of MacDiarmid's ascetical Protestant lineage. However, this religious atheist moves beyond even that stark creed: 'I cam' unto a place where there / Seemed nocht but naethingness'.[40] Such existential loneliness, moving beyond the idea of God and finding only an abyss of silence, is mirrored in 'Empty Vessel' from *Penny Wheep* in which 'A lass wi' tousie hair / Singin' till a bairnie / That was nae langer there' finds the universe indifferent to her loss and grief: 'The licht that bends owre a'thing / Is less ta'en up wi't'.[41] Similarly, the other planets of the cosmos cannot even spare a thought for 'Earth thou bonnie broukit bairn!'.[42] The balladeer understands that such metaphysical emptiness has been filled by humanity in its own image; as such, for Man, 'God Himsel'' is only 'A way o' lookin' at himsel''.[43] If God is the reflection of humanity seen through the mirror of its own desires, then the exciting scientific discoveries occurring in MacDiarmid's lifetime bring with them new modernistic approaches to subjectivity and reality. Such relativism allows the poet to speculate in cosmological fashion:

> And staunin' as you're staun'in' noo,
> And wi' things as they are
> Ye'd be as gin ye stude upon
> Anither kind o' star.[44]

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[39] *CP1*, pp. 36, 38 ('Ballad of the Five Senses').
[40] *CP1*, p. 38.
[41] *CP1*, p. 66 ('The Empty Vessel').
[42] *CP1*, p. 17 ('The Bonnie Broukit Bairn').
[43] *CP1*, p. 40 ('Ballad of the Five Senses').
[44] *CP1*, p. 39-40.

These early poems may deal with the absence of God, but the figure of Christ is a dominant one throughout. In *A Drunk Man* Christ remains central to the poet's concern that humans should strive to be more spiritually alive than the 'feck o' mankind' ordinarily show themselves to be, the poet-Christ becoming an unforgiving Calvinistic *Übermensch* figure.[45] The earlier Scots lyrics, however, display an almost sad tenderness to Christ. 'O Jesu Parvule' shows the Christ child in His mother's arms – 'His mither sings to the bairnie Christ' – yet failing to find comfort, a prefiguration of the sadness, sacrifice and pain He is to suffer in His adult life:

> 'Fa' owre, ma hinny, fa' owre, fa' owre,
> A' body's sleepin' binna oorsels.'
> She's drawn him in tae the bool o' her breist
> But the byspale's nae thocht o' sleep i' the least.
> *Balloo, wee mannie, balloo, balloo.*[46]

'I Heard Christ Sing' imagines the crucifixion and the song of the spirit that emanates from the lips of the physically broken Jesus – 'the bonniest sang that e'er / Was sung sin' Time began' – while 'The Innumerable Christ' again links Christ's death-agony with the wail of sorrow he gives for humanity as a 'Babe'.[47]

What these poems suggest is at least some clinging memory of, perhaps even affection for, the religion of MacDiarmid's childhood, something that in his more frequent and robust political moods he thoroughly denied:

> My parents were very devout and as a boy, a small boy, I had to go to church several times every Sunday, and I had to go to Bible class and Sunday school and so on, you see. And it wasn't until I was... about fifteen or sixteen, that I repudiated the lot. I didn't quarrel with my parents about it. There would be no point in that. But I just made it clear that I disassociated myself completely. I became a complete atheist, you see – and still am. But

[45] *CP1*, p. 100 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[46] *CP1*, p. 31 ('O Jesu Parvule').
[47] *CP1*, p. 19 ('I Heard Christ Sing'); p. 32 ('The Innumerable Christ').

> I'd had all this indoctrination that I'd been subjected to up till then and it's still part of my vocabulary.[48]

These early poems are soaked in the 'vocabulary' of MacDiarmid's memory of his years in Langholm. His time in provincial Montrose was, in part, so productive because in some deep-rooted psychological and emotional manner it reconnected him to the folk-memory of his earliest childhood: the native Scots tongue, the religious imagery and the insistence on rural rather than urban settings. This last point is particularly pertinent when examining *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*. In both collections only one poem, 'Glasgow' from *Sangschaw*, has an obviously urban, industrial setting, and it is written in English. This intensely local colouring that flows through MacDiarmid's work flowered most abundantly in provincial Montrose.

MacDiarmid's concern with the local is prevalent in the pages of the *Montrose Review*. As far back as 1920, in MacDiarmid's first brief period in the town, we find in the *Review* an attempt to open up hidden areas of the town's history and resources to the unaware local reader. On 26 March 1920, in a section called 'Among My Books, By A Montrosian' a writer, possibly a recently arrived MacDiarmid, admires the wealth of material to be found in Montrose Library:

> The two outstanding items of interest in the list under consideration are undoubtedly the two additions to that most valuable feature or adjunct of the Library – the Local Corner – wherein already lies ample material, not otherwise readily obtainable and in certain cases elsewhere unobtainable, for the future historian of the burgh. The majority of readers scarcely appreciate it at its true value, I fear.[49]

The 'two outstanding items of interest' are George Beattie's 'John o' Arnha'' and 'a copy of the electioneering bill relating to the candidature of Horatio Ross of Rossie for

[48] *RT3*, pp. 594-5 (Radio Telefis Eirann, 'The Arts: Hammer & Thistle', An Interview with Micheál O hUanacháin, 23 February 1978).
[49] *Montrose Review*, 26 March 1920, p. 3.

the representation of Aberdeen in 1837'.[50] This is a typically MacDiarmidian fusion of interests: poetry and politics in a local environment.

The following week, in the same column, the writer is already apologizing for having 'bit off perhaps more than I can conveniently chew' in detailing the contents of the Local Corner.[51] This indicates even more strongly that the writer may be MacDiarmid, as abandoning projects amidst the welter of all his other activities is characteristic. However, 'Montrosian' then goes on in more detail to point out the worth of the Local Corner:

> First then, a word on the genesis and value of the Local Corner! The value of such a feature cannot be overestimated. It is – or rather should be – the most vital branch of the institution. Its uses and functions are inexhaustible and grow with the years. Local education stands indisputably in need of a new orientation in regard to this matter. The historical section of the curriculum is comparatively valueless as matters stand. History like charity should begin at home. The matter need not be laboured here. A greatly extended appreciation of the place and importance of local history is already developing. If these notes serve to accelerate the movement in Montrose, they will have been written to splendid purpose.[52]

Beginning with his boyhood exploration of Langholm Library, MacDiarmid would understand the value of local libraries in his autodidactic pursuit of material through which to ideologically fashion a new Scottish Republic. The central idea of this piece on the Local Corner, that 'History like charity should begin at home' – echoed in MacDiarmid's promise to 'be faithful in small things first' – is perfectly exemplified by an article appearing on the same day in the *Review* entitled 'The Port And Burgh of Montrose: Essays In Local Economic History'.[53] It is difficult to decide whether this article was actually penned by MacDiarmid. Several features suggest that it may have been: the interest in local history and economics, the extensive use of quotations, the

[50] *Montrose Review*, 26 March 1920, p. 3.
[51] *Montrose Review*, 2 April 1920, p. 5.
[52] Ibid.
[53] *A*, p. 531 ('Fidelity in Small Things').

first being drawn from a favourite source, *The Times Literary Supplement* (attributed in this instance). What is most impressive, however, is simply the commitment by the newspaper to carry features on local history of this length at all. Whether the author or not, working in an environment which encouraged a concern for the local must have helped to nourish MacDiarmid's other activities, such as his lyric writing in Scots and his corresponding promulgation of a Scottish cultural and political renaissance.

When standing for election to Montrose Town Council in November 1922 one of the main ideas that MacDiarmid proposed was that trade should stay local: 'I believe that no work should be sent out of town which can possibly be allocated locally'.[54] On the same day that his election address appeared in the *Montrose Review* a letter of his was printed in the correspondence columns. Entitled 'Harbour Board Representation', it concerns the building of new dock gates and the dredging of the harbour. Grieve's contention is that in commercial operations many local councillors are putting their own private interests before that of the public and that as a result business in Montrose is suffering:

> Montrose Harbour history is an amazing record of the 'rigging' of public affairs to suit private interests, and the desuetude of local trade is largely due to the selfish and short-sighted policy of men ostensibly representing the community but actually furthering their individual interests (and, on occasion, indulging their individual spleens) – regardless of the general consequences to the burgh, and employing when necessity arose the most unscrupulous means.[55]

The idea that councillors pursued their own private interests rather than seeking the good of the burgh was one MacDiarmid returned to in an interview with *Scottish Marxist*, referring to the 'very great deal of graft going on' in Montrose Town Council.[56] By the time of this interview in 1975, the marxist MacDiarmid realized that

[54] *Montrose Review*, 3 November 1922, p. 4.
[55] Ibid., p. 8.
[56] *RT3*, p. 572 (*Scottish Marxist*, 1975).

'in a Capitalist society a body like a Town Council must be a bourgeois body and subject to all the graft and the pressures of business interests'.[57] In the 1920s, this Scottish nationalist and local socialist councillor proposed an internationalist politics of place that believed in prioritizing and transforming the local. An editorial appearing in the *Review* in January 1924 suggests a 'Montrose First' movement that chimes with the idea at the heart of MacDiarmid's election address to keep trade local:

> The essence of the contention advanced is that steps should be taken to ensure that no work that can be done locally should be sent out of town, and that all money earned locally should be spent locally – other things being equal.[58]

MacDiarmid's commitment to Montrose is evident in these examples of his work as a councillor and journalist, this political localism informing and ideologically augmenting the intimately local language and setting of his modernist Scots lyrics.

MacDiarmid's lyrics in Scots anticipate, in less obviously intellectual but no less effective terms, the metaphysical concerns of *A Drunk Man* and *To Circumjack Cencrastus*. However, they do so in a way that seems less alienated from the local community and the bonds of family, both in the Langholm past and the Montrose of the 1920s, that helped nurture such work. For instance, 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' combines metaphysical tenderness towards the Earth with personal love for the dedicatee of the poem, the poet's first wife Peggy. 'The Watergaw' fuses the natural beauty of a rainbow, symbolizing speculation as to a possible hereafter, with a poet thinking more sorrowfully and empathetically of his father's death than the later Leninist intellectual of 'At My Father's Grave'. Many of the lyrics also suggest loving connection with the countryside and farmland of rural Scotland, perhaps inspired by

[57] *RT3*, p. 572 (*Scottish Marxist*, 1975).
[58] *Montrose Review*, 25 January 1924, p. 4.

Langholm and the Scottish Borders, but surely marshalled into poetic life by the beauty of Angus:

> Wi' sae mony wild roses
> Dancin' and daffin'
> It looks as tho' a'
> The countryside's laffin'.[59]

As in 'Wild Roses', MacDiarmid's Scots lyrics can be reminiscent of Burns in their coupling of the natural radiance of the local rural scene with love for a girl among the rigs of barley.

These beautiful poems are written in a Scots not necessarily as synthetic or artificial as some commentators maintain. J. Derrick McClure argues that the 'MacDiarmidian Revolution' is following a Scottish poetic tradition in its synthetic approach:

> That MacDiarmid wrote in a wholly 'synthetic language', or even one which is, as language, much more recondite than that of his immediate or his eighteenth-century predecessors, is simply untenable.[60]

The demotic nature of much Scottish literature means that some of the Scots words of *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep* would have still been used on the High Street and port of Montrose and the surrounding farmlands of Angus in the 1920s, just not in such stunning combination as appears in MacDiarmid's lyrics.

This point is borne out when examining the *Montrose Review*. As William Donaldson's important study of *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland* (1986) makes clear, the provincial press in Scotland was an assiduous carrier of poetry and fiction written in Scots, suggesting 'that use of the Scots language was much more extensive and important than might otherwise be concluded on the evidence of a book-

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[59] *CP1*, p. 55 ('Wild Roses').
[60] J. Derrick McClure, *Language Poetry and Nationhood: Scots as a Poetic Language from 1878 to the Present*, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), p. 100.

culture produced for an all-UK market'.[61] In the *Review* of the 1920s the populist tradition of Scots writing uncovered by Donaldson from 1840 to 1900 is still active, if in somewhat diluted form. As a local journalist, MacDiarmid would have been soaked in this atmosphere of Scottish popular writing, something his ultra-modernist tendencies would renounce but that, nonetheless, deeply informs such modernism as exemplified MacDiarmid's work in the twenties. Despite the authoritarian elitism of much of MacDiarmid's propaganda for a Scottish Renaissance – 'it is in the power of a handful to create or re-create a country in this powerful spiritually dynamic way, and to convict their antipathetic fellow-countrymen of a species of imbecility in the face of the world' – his modernist, synthetic Scots poetry is an adaptation of populist forms drawn from a well of localism inherent in the journalistic culture of provincial Scotland.[62]

Writing of 'Contemporary Scottish Poetry' in 1929, his last year in Montrose, MacDiarmid praises his own artistic endeavours in the town by claiming that 'no language in which great literature had been produced had been so hopelessly degraded as Braid Scots before the synthetic method began to recondition it a few years ago'.[63] To 'recondition' implies no clean break with a populist past but an attempt to develop and evolve still workable linguistic material in the modernist culture of an internationalist Scotland of the future. Is the Scots language more evolutionary 'Cast-offs', the poet of 'Gairmscoile' asks:

> But wha mak's life a means to ony end?
> This sterves and that stuff's fu', scraps this and succors that?[64]

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[61] William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: Language, Fiction and the Press* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), p. xii.
[62] *RT2*, p. 80 ('Towards a Scottish Renaissance: desirable lines of advance').
[63] *RT2*, p. 169 ('Contemporary Scottish Poetry').
[64] *CP1*, p. 73 ('Gairmscoile').

The poet's spiritual evolutionism has no sympathy with the popular misconception of Darwinism: 'The best survive there's nane but fules contend'.[65] The socialist propagandist of Scottish Renaissance asks:

> We are told that Scots, and, even more, Gaelic, have had to give way owing to over-ruling economic tendencies – but had they? Are these tendencies good in themselves? Is mankind made for economics or economics by mankind?[66]

He replies with the MacDiarmidian credo of the crucially symbiotic relationship between the particular and the universal, the core of his Scottish Republican politics of place: 'The logical conclusion of the process our opponents defend is the negation of not only nationality, but of personality. In the last analysis this is a reductio ad absurdum of their case'.[67] The spirit of the nation, the Dedalusian conscience of the race, cannot be (re)created in a foreign tongue – 'Wull Gabriel in Esperanto cry / Or a the warld's undeemis jargons try?' – but must come instead from the irrationally national '*herts o' men*'.[68] MacDiarmid's switch from writing in a contrived, post-Georgian English to lyrical Scots is inspired by his immersion in the local concerns of the Montrose community. His synthetic Scots is no reactionary, backward step, but a modernist stance that draws on the populist tradition of local Scottish poetry and fiction in order to radically refashion the future cultural and political state of the nation:

> For we ha'e faith in Scotland's hidden poo'ers,
> The present's theirs, but a' the past and future's oors.[69]

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[65] *CP1*, p. 73 ('Gairmscoile').
[66] *RT2*, p. 78 ('Towards a Scottish Renaissance: desirable lines of advance').
[67] Ibid.
[68] *CP1*, p. 74 ('Gairmscoile').
[69] *CP1*, p. 75.

MacDiarmid's lifelong desire to see an independent parliament sit once more in Edinburgh and the fact that he helped to found the National Party of Scotland in 1928, along with his political work in the early twenties with the ILP, displays an eagerness to be part of the political scene on the national stage. Yet, as we have seen, he also showed political tenacity and strength of purpose at the local level. His assistance in the instigation of the Montrose Parliamentary Debating Society in 1923 betrays MacDiarmid's impatience with the national situation, at the same time as giving a forum at the local level for intellectual debate.

That national and local considerations are fused in MacDiarmid's thinking is suggested by an editorial from the *Montrose Review*:

> Steps are now being taken to form a Montrose Parliamentary Debating Society as suggested by Mr W.D. M'Laren. The idea is less to encourage amateur oratory than earnest and effective thinking. To model such a Society at all closely on the 'Mother of Parliaments' would be to immerse its activities in a strangling mesh of procedure. Life is too short to fid-faddle in this fashion. A political debating Society concerning itself with the mass of minor issues would probably be short-lived in Montrose.[70]

As MacDiarmid was to say in different contexts throughout his life: 'This, after all, is the tie between nationalism and internationalism. There is nothing more universal than the local.'[71] If true internationalism, not the characterless capitalist cosmopolitanism of the metropolitan core, requires nationalism as its basis, then an independent nation needs within itself a flourishing regional life. An organization such as the Montrose Parliamentary Debating Society can be seen as a valuable contribution to democracy at all levels.

At the Society's first debate on Monday 28 January 1924 in the Town Buildings in Montrose the unemployment issue was discussed. Hospitalmaster Grieve put forward the Douglasite proposition that

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[70] *Montrose Review*, 21 December 1923, p. 4.
[71] *RT3*, p. 135 ('Memorial to William Stewart').

> The masses of the people were short of money – but money, the want of which caused so much misery and distress, cost nothing to produce. The problem was to supply this costless product in a way which would maintain productivity while increasing the purchasing power of the people to an adequate extent. That could be done by destroying the present financial system and applying the social credit of this great nation to its proper purpose.[72]

The report of the debate in the next edition of the *Review* makes interesting reading as it suggests that at this period in MacDiarmid's intellectual life he fused the ideas of socialism and Christianity:

> Hospital-Master Grieve led off for the Labour Party. Leaving it to his colleagues to put forward immediate relief schemes, he dealt with their opponents' schemes – more production, decreased wages, more thrift, etc. – and said that none of these would solve the problem. Socialism was the only cure – the substitution of a Christian commonwealth for a state of society founded on usury, by liberating human productivity from the stranglehold of the present financial system.[73]

Quite how Christianity would liberate society from capitalism isn't made clear. For MacDiarmid, this Herculean task was usually solvable through the Social Credit panaceas of Major Douglas. MacDiarmid's views on the Labour Movement in Scotland would also change over the years as he grew to see its purported internationalism as a form of English ascendancy that, in league with the business interests of capitalism, would deny national self-determination to Scotland:

> In Scotland, as in every other country concerned with the maintenance and development or recovery of a national culture, it is becoming realised that sectionised interests are not only capable of withstanding the great over-ruling tendency towards standardisation inherent in contemporary industrialism, dependent in the last analysis on cosmopolitan finance, but that that sectionising of interests is in itself merely an index of how far disintegration has already gone. Scottish interests have been deplorably 'atomised'. We have a whole series of isolated movements little related, and often antagonistic, to each other and making for nothing that is nationally synthetic.[74]

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[72] *Montrose Review*, 1 February 1924, p. 8.
[73] Ibid., p. 4.
[74] *RT2*, p. 37 ('Towards a "Scottish Idea"').

A politics of place that unifies Scottish nationalism and international socialism, and a grouping together of ideologically disparate writers under the banner of the Scottish Renaissance movement, can be best understood as MacDiarmid's attempt to effect the 'reintegration' of an 'atomised' nation through a unifying 'Scottish Idea'.[75]

In the early months of 1922 a series of letters appeared in the correspondence columns of the *Montrose Review* on the subject of 'Home Rule for Scotland'. Grieve kicked this off on 20 January with a letter calling for backing in Montrose for a Scots National League, the aim of which would be full Scottish independence. In reply to this J. Spears Burt, the Local Secretary of the Scottish Home Rule Association, wrote a letter to the *Review* that appeared on 3 February. Burt's contention 'that the Scottish people have too much practical wisdom ever to follow the example of Sinn Fein Ireland in her demands for an independent republic' was exactly the ca' canny spirit that propelled MacDiarmid towards a radical Scottish Republicanism in the 1930s.[76] A week later on 10 February, his own reply appearing in the *Review* emphasizes the unyielding nature of the local socialist councillor's twenties Scottish nationalism:

> Even had I come to the conclusion that Dominion Home Rule was a sufficient objective I would not have joined the Association Mr Burt represents – for the simple reason that the Association in question is moribund.
>
> The intensive propaganda of the Scots National League may have as a subsidiary effect the reanimation of that body by the accession to its ranks of those who do not share the motto which describes the psychology of the majority of the member of the S.N.L. – 'Of two policies always chose [*sic*] the boldest'.[77]

MacDiarmid then goes on to enumerate the countries that had recently and successfully severed their imperial ties, before arguing the economic and legal case for

[75] *RT2*, p. 37 ('Towards a "Scottish Idea"').
[76] *Montrose Review*, 3 February 1922, p. 4.
[77] *Montrose Review*, 10 February 1922, p. 4.

complete independence. The letter ends with a return to MacDiarmid's uncompromising stance:

> I am satisfied that hard-headed practical business men who consider the matter will see that the true 'anti-waste' policy in Scotland [...] lies along lines calculated to stop this squandering on the wild cat schemes of an alien Government, traditionally contemptuous of Scottish interests, of three-fourths of the annual revenues raised in Scotland.
>
> In conclusion, I would remind Mr Spears Burt that 'rights are not granted. They are taken.' Scotland is a Sovereign State, and as such she cannot, consistently with that status, accept any 'grant' of Home Rule from England.[78]

If such skirmishes in the correspondence columns of the *Review* were the local inception of MacDiarmid's propagandistic efforts on behalf of Scottish nationalism, then he moved to a potentially national stage in 1923 with the founding of the weekly *Scottish Nation*, first advertised in the *Review* on 4 May:

> NEW ALL-SCOTTISH WEEKLY – Councillor C.M. Grieve, Montrose, is editing and publishing, and the Review Press are printing, a new weekly entitled, 'The Scottish Nation', devoted to Scottish Nationalism, Progressive Politics, and Scottish Arts and Letters. The first issue will be published on Tuesday, 8th inst. The price is 3d, and the paper is available at all newsagents, bookstalls, etc., throughout Scotland.[79]

As Glen Murray comments, 'cultural devolution required such a periodical urgently', it being important for Scottish cultural and political concerns that the nation had an intellectual journal that was actually published in Scotland.[80] MacDiarmid contributed 'Topics of the Week' and 'At the Sign of the Thistle' each week. The *Scottish Nation* only ran until 25 December 1923, but in its thirty-four week life it provided valuable space for articles dealing with crucial Scottish affairs.

The *Montrose Review* ran a series of articles from the *Scottish Nation* beginning with two from 29 June, 'The Sacrifice of Scottish Interests' and 'The Threatened

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[78] *Montrose Review*, 10 February 1922, p. 4.
[79] *Montrose Review*, 4 May 1923, p. 5.
[80] Glen Murray, 'MacDiarmid's Media 1911-1936', *RTI*, p. xiv.

Deportations'. The former piece is an acknowledged passage lifted directly from 'The Lloyd George Liberal Magazine' and details the opinions of the Rt. Hon. Ian Macpherson, M.P. on the manner in which Scottish interests are demoted in the Westminster Parliament. 'The Threatened Deportations' again uses Macpherson as a source in order to discuss the problem of emigration, particularly from the Highlands, an issue that MacDiarmid was to raise in the pages of the *Review* on numerous occasions.

On the 8 June, for instance, in the 'Round the Town' section of the newspaper, we find a writer, probably MacDiarmid, issuing a rallying cry to the nation:

> If the people of Scotland do not wake up and take action to arrest this loss of blood and energy, the country is doomed to decay. It is hopeless to urge the Government and parliament to stop the drain and reform the conditions which have made the drain inevitable. Successive Governments have made promises which have not been fulfilled. Hopes deferred have made the hearts of the Highlanders and Islanders sick [...] In Ireland the peasantry hit back and made a din, and the Government showered reforms upon them. In Scotland the crofters and fisherman could emigrate or starve for 'sheep, deer and grouse are more profitable than men'. And the 'representatives' in Parliament of the crofters and fisherman of the highlands and islands are keenly discussing the 'status' of the Secretary for Scotland, while Scotland is being steadily depopulated.[81]

Ideas such as inhibiting the 'loss of blood and energy' through emigration from Scotland indicates the desire for a 'Scotland First' policy as propounded in two now notorious articles that appeared in the *Scottish Nation* in June 1923, 'Plea for a Scottish Fascism' and 'Programme for a Scottish Fascism'.[82] For MacDiarmid, Scottish Fascism would be Leftist: 'its immediate enemies are not the "Bolshies" in our midst, but the bourgeoisie'.[83] Similarly, this metaphysical Scot believes that 'nationalism is opposed to capitalist materialism' – the former being cultural, even religious in nature – and 'that the revival of the Scots Vernacular depends upon the

[81] *Montrose Review*, 8 June 1923, p. 5.
[82] *SP*, p. 34 ('Programme for a Scottish Fascism').
[83] *RTI*, p. 84 ('Plea for a Scottish Fascism').

establishment of some form of Socialism in Scotland'.[84] MacDiarmid is running several ordinarily opposed ideas together here, hoping that their 'simultaneity shows them as aspects of one and the same force in Scottish life': a will to political self-determination '*that will preserve our distinctive national culture*'.[85]

In an interview in the last year of his life, MacDiarmid explained the pull he felt in the twenties towards a fascist ideology:

> at that time, Mussolini, who after all had run a socialist paper and so on, you know – he was draining the Po marshes and seemed to be moving toward solving the unemployment problem in Italy, you see. And in this country, and all over Europe, there were a lot of people who thought the solution lay there, you see. I was only one of them. The British Government was another. Ezra Pound was another, you see. I didn't go as far as Pound to broadcast in favour of Mussolini or Hitler... But I thought that something absolutely drastic required to be done.[86]

MacDiarmid's attraction to fascism in the 1920s was a common response of the modernist Western intelligentsia to civilizational crisis, similar in this respect to the appeal of communism in the 'devil's decade' of the thirties. As we shall see in Chapter Five of this thesis, the irrationalist poet of the 'self-elected Elect' was certainly drawn to anti-democratic absolutes as a means to oppose the 'short-circuiting of consciousness' of capitalist mass culture. However, as Alan Riach says, 'the extremes he went to are often better thought of as strategic necessities than as irresponsible excesses'.[87] With MacDiarmid, these absolutist tendencies not only display the desire to shake things up in a national scene that he considered to be moribund but are also, as Chapter One illustrates, the attempt to delineate lines of identity that could be props upon which future political praxis in the 'debatable land' of modern Scottish culture and politics could be based.

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[84] *SP*, p. 36 ('Programme for a Scottish Fascism').
[85] *SP*, pp. 36, 38.
[86] *RT3*, p. 596 (Radio Telefis Eirann, 'The Arts: Hammer & Thistle, An Interview with Micheál O hUanacháin, 1978).
[87] Alan Riach, 'Introduction', *SP*, p. xvi.

MacDiarmid's 'Scotland First' call is an attempt to face the practical difficulties of a depopulated nation head on; it is not a plea for blood and soil exclusivity or racism. This is illustrated by his article in the *Modern Scot* from 1930 opposing the illiberal and sectarian Home Rule policy of such as the Duke of Montrose and Lewis Spence:

> His Grace [the Duke of Montrose] contends that Scottish people can look after their own interests without the help of Irish, Poles, English and other aliens. The answer is – then why haven't they done so? Even His Grace's efforts over many years have failed to stir them up, and Scottish interests have been sacrificed all along the line. In any case, these aliens are citizens of Scotland and their interests are bound up with its condition. Does His Grace propose to disfranchise them – or, like Mr Spence, to evict them? Why can't he face the practical political situation, recognize them for the important, permanent, and increasing factors they are in our electorate, and be ready to welcome any signs they show of identifying themselves with Scottish interests and becoming true citizens of our country? They cannot be worse Scots than the majority of our own people have been, and are.[88]

MacDiarmid's greatest scorn is always reserved for the mass of his own people.

He was particularly critical of ministers of the Kirk, whether of their literary efforts or political opinions. Alongside the continuing problem of emigration, the *Montrose Review* reported the perceived difficulties caused by immigration, specifically from Ireland. This was seen as a real danger within the Church of Scotland which, whilst intimating concern for the possible lowering of social conditions, especially in the major cities, was more worried about the lessening of its own influence due to an influx of Roman Catholics.

Two articles from the *Review* in 1926 show the depth of alarm perpetrated by Kirk propaganda. One entitled 'Irish Immigrant Danger' details a communication sent to the Secretary for Scotland by two Church of Scotland ministers asking for enquiry into the subject and action to be taken:

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[88] *SP*, p. 56 ('Clan Albainn').

> The communication points out that the process of unregulated immigration had brought about a situation where there was a danger of the control of the affairs of their own country passing out of the hands of the Scottish people and even endangering the continued existence of Scottish nationality and civilisation.[89]

The 'Future of Scottish Race' illustrates the connivance of Calvinism and capitalism with an address made by the Rev. Duncan Cameron to Glasgow City Business Group:

> Mr Cameron began his remarks by affirming that unless drastic measures were taken to safeguard the Scottish race in their native land, within the next thirty years the Irish population would be predominant in the industrial areas of Scotland, and that they would be in a position to dictate the lines of policy in Parliamentary, municipal, and parochial activities. He instanced the case of Port-Glasgow, where, he said, already nearly one half of the population was Irish Roman Catholic, and he also referred to the industrial towns of Dumbarton, Coatbridge, and Motherwell, where about one-third of the population was also Irish Roman Catholic [...] Mr Cameron contended that although the middle classes of Scotland would probably remain for a long period Scottish, yet as the working classes became predominantly Irish they would be able to determine financial and political policies in their interests and in the interests of the Roman Catholic Church.[90]

MacDiarmid, on the other hand, looked forward to the Irishing of Scotland as one route to the massive psychological change that would be needed to ward off the anglicization of Scotland. For MacDiarmid, a Gaelic Scotland was closer to the essential metaphysical nation than Anglo-Protestant imperial Britishness.

There is an aspect of the reactionary and mythopoetic about this idea, particularly when employed in longer works such as *To Circumjack Cencrastus* – published in 1930 but largely written in Montrose – from which an almost Jacobitical aura of lost cause emanates. Writing to Oliver St John Gogarty (Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*) from London in 1930 just after leaving Montrose, MacDiarmid claims to have discarded his socialism and become a 'crusted old Tory'.[91] *Cencrastus* is certainly a pessimistic poem, claiming that 'Freedom is *inconceivable*' and drawing a

[89] *Montrose Review*, 28 May 1926, p. 4.
[90] *Montrose Review*, 9 April 1926, p. 2.
[91] *L*, p. 383 (to Oliver St John Gogarty, 7 January 1930).

connection between aestheticism and political reaction: 'Better a'e gowden lyric / Than a social problem solved'.[92] MacDiarmid attempts to find inspiration for Scotland's future spiritual destiny in the cultural glories of the Gaelic past and, spuriously perhaps, connect potential Scottish Renaissance with the contemporary Irish cultural and political regeneration he approved. However, in his role as Gaelic bard he somewhat confusedly calls the Protestant Yeats 'my kingly cousin', perhaps recognizing the Irish nationalist in this regard as a fellow cultural faker.[93] Mimicking the 'faith' of the recently published 'The Tower' (1928) – 'I mock Plotinus' thought / And cry in Plato's teeth' – a poem celebrating Yeats's ruling-minority Protestant lineage, MacDiarmid's irrationalism can 'hear a fool (Plotinus he is ca'd)' undermine his 'Unity' of 'Thocht', to which he ruefully turns as 'to a trachled wife' (the recently departed Peggy?).[94] A racialized Gaelic Idea that does not see modern Scotland whole may compromise the radicalism of MacDiarmid's Scottish Republican politics of place. However, it is a nationalist defence of difference for a periphery under pressure conceived in provincial Montrose.

In tandem with such abstract theories, MacDiarmid was still able to discuss the practical politics that surrounded the immigration issue. In the 'Round The Town' section of the *Review*, one week after the article on the 'Future of Scottish Race' a writer, very possibly MacDiarmid, deals at length with the Rev. Cameron's address. Objecting first of all to the depiction of the Irish Catholic proletariat as 'of a low type' who pose a 'threat' as 'unsettling' as 'that of a Bolshevik plot to overthrow by force the existing social order', the writer proceeds to examine the real economic causes of immigration and emigration:

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[92] *CP1*, pp. 185, 265 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[93] *CP1*, p. 185.
[94] W.B. Yeats, 'The Tower', *Collected Poems* (London: Picador, in association with Macmillan, 1990; 1933), p. 223; *CP1*, p. 217 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).

> The root of the trouble began, not now, but several generations ago, in the Highland clearances to make room for sheep or game. To-day its feeders are to be found in unemployment and low wages, which seem comparatively high to semi-starved Irishmen, and in farmers putting aside the plough and turning fields into grazings. It is within living memory that colliery owners brought to Scotland Poles and Lithuanians to fill the places of Scottish miners on strike, and Poles and Lithuanians are numerous to-day in Lanarkshire. Mr Cameron referred to the Irish in Coatbridge and Motherwell. He might well have added in Airdrie and Wishaw. In these places the housing conditions are simply appalling, a disgrace to civilisation. It has been left to the Scottish Labour Members of Parliament to denounce them and to demand reform. These housing conditions are a bigger problem, more urgently demanding reform, and a graver menace than the Irish question, but the Protestant clergy have not been conspicuous in focussing public attention on the sore.[95]

The article ends by positing what the writer believes to be the only solution to these problems: 'a real measure of Home Rule for Scotland. There is little hope of bettering the economic conditions of Scotland and of keeping its native population at home as long as its seat of Government is in London'.[96]

MacDiarmid was to concentrate much more firmly on his efforts for the Nationalist movement as the 1920s progressed. It was announced in the 29 August 1924 edition of the *Review* that

> Hospitalmaster C.M. Grieve has resigned from the various public bodies of which he is a member, intimating that he finds it necessary to do so for business reasons, although he does so with regret, as his heart has been in the work [...] He is the only Socialist member of the Council.[97]

MacDiarmid was to remember his experience as a councillor in Montrose rather differently some fifty years later from the formal tone of 'regret' of this notice:

> I enjoyed the experience it gave me as a journalist, [it] showed me aspects of local life and so on that I might not otherwise have had access to, but apart from that, from a purely political point of view, it was a very disillusioning experience.[98]

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[95] *Montrose Review*, 16 April 1926, p. 5.
[96] Ibid.
[97] *Montrose Review*, 29 August 1924, p. 5.
[98] *RT3*, pp. 572-3 (*Scottish Marxist*, 1975).

Disillusionment may have seemed apparent to MacDiarmid in retrospect, but he clearly worked hard as a councillor and argued consistently from a socialist standpoint, on issues ranging from low wages to fee-paying schools. He remained a member of the ILP and on Sunday 12 October 1924 took part in a discussion on the 'Industrial Crisis'. On 3 November, the Labour Government fell and was replaced by Baldwin and the Unionists. Possibly MacDiarmid's decision to resign from his council work had as much to do with his turning increasingly towards nationalism as it was with his 'business interests'.

Such interests – the writing of poetry and the furthering of the Scottish Renaissance movement – are of course inextricably linked to his nationalism. This is illustrated by the inaugural lecture he gave to the Edinburgh University Historical Association on 17 October 1924. Entitled 'History and Imagination, with Special Reference to Scottish Affairs', MacDiarmid contended (in the words of the *Review* writer, possibly MacDiarmid commenting on his own activities) that

> The true criterion of history was its power of making history and that Scottish history had hitherto lamentably failed to rise above a dead-level of mediocrity mainly because it lacked all sense of tendency, and art of significant alignment and anticipation. The essential instruments of history, redeemed by true purpose, then, were not so much laborious research as the creative spirit and imaginative sympathy.[99]

MacDiarmid went on to argue for the use of Scots rather than English in poetry by the Scottish writer, insisting that to write in English was to be condemned to historical oblivion. He then 'emphasised the necessity for Scottish history getting rid of that perpetual Provincialism which had hitherto condemned it to structural and spiritual obsolescence'.[100] MacDiarmid is clearly beginning to think along lines that would lead

[99] *Montrose Review*, 24 October 1924, p. 5.
[100] Ibid.

to his poetic denunciation of Scottish provincialism, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*.

A Drunk Man was published on 22 November 1926. Having cleared a space for himself by resigning from his council activities in 1924, there is a noticeable decline in mention of MacDiarmid in the pages of the *Review* and *Standard* in 1925. On 27 February of that year, MacDiarmid was re-elected as a member of the Committee of the League of Nations in a 'lantern lecture' at Montrose. From the *Review* of 3 April we find him giving a lecture to the local branch of the ILP on 'The Banking System with special reference to Major Douglas's New Economic Theorem and the Credit Reform Movement, and to the Gold Standard, the raising of the Bank rate, and international debts'.[101] Despite bowing out of council work, MacDiarmid signed his employer Joseph Foreman's nomination paper for the council election at the end of October 1925.

There is even less to report from the pages of the *Montrose Standard* in 1925. *Sangschaw* is reviewed in the 'Literature' column on 11 September. It gives the collection high praise, which may mean that MacDiarmid himself wrote it:

> Mr M'Diarmid is a young writer and poet whose work is rightly attracting wide spread notice. It is not possible at present to state the place he may ultimately win. He is in advance of his times and the literary world may refuse to follow, or may hold him with something like awe as a guiding star. They cannot afford to ignore him.[102]

The review goes on to mention the fact that some of the poems in the collection contain blasphemous passages 'that will jar on the reverent Christian mind, but the poet would probably retort that is the Christian mind that is at fault and not his poetry'.[103]

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[101] *Montrose Review*, 3 April 1925, p. 5.
[102] *Montrose Standard*, 11 September 1925, p. 6.
[103] Ibid.

Although according to Bold MacDiarmid worked for the *Standard*, the evidence for this is difficult to discern. Founded in 1837, the *Montrose Standard and Angus and Mearns Register* was an eight-page weekly newspaper that was ideologically Unionist, imperialist and Christian, everything that MacDiarmid wasn't. The politics of the paper being what they were it is almost impossible to see traces of MacDiarmid's pen within its pages. If he did write for the newspaper he would have had to disguise his own politics in order to do so. Even the 'Literature' column, from which the above review of *Sangschaw* is taken, is problematic in this respect.

For instance, on 11 June 1920 a review appears of *All Things are Possible* by Leo Shestov. As W.N. Herbert has illustrated, this was an important book for the irrationalist poet, MacDiarmid describing Shestov as 'my master' who will help effect 'the reconciliation of all opposites'.[104] The reviewer, however, evidently does not rate Shestov quite so highly as MacDiarmid: 'It must be added that in reading Shestov it is necessary not to take him too seriously'.[105] And yet the article also names Amiel, another writer to influence MacDiarmid and about whom he wrote a poem. For the reviewer, what Shestov

> gives us in this book is a series of loosely-strung reflections on life. His point of view is one of almost complete scepticism. He distrusts metaphysics, but he distrusts science quite as much. He will have nothing to do with ideals or general truths. He looks out on the panorama of life with cynical amusement, and if he has any principle at all it is to live life as you like and not take life too seriously.[106]

It is unlikely that MacDiarmid wrote this review, although it is possible that he would change his style in order to fit in with that of the newspaper.

The *Standard* certainly details MacDiarmid's activities in Montrose, although not so assiduously as the *Review*. One article that may be from MacDiarmid's pen

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[104] See Herbert, *To Circumjack MacDiarmid*, pp. 6-7, 34, 54, 132; *CP2*, p. 1170 (Dìreadh I').
[105] *Montrose Standard*, 11 June 1926, p. 6.
[106] Ibid.

appears in the *Standard* of 19 August 1927. Entitled 'A Student's Visit to Scotland – 1926', it details a trip made by Dr Hans Mannhard, a German educationalist, to Britain in the summer of that year. Four weeks of Dr Mannhard's six-week visit were spent in Scotland and during this time he headed for Montrose, among other places. Once in the town, he explored the Public Library and found out a little about the Adult School Movement. He also tells us about his meeting with a certain Scottish poet:

> A genuine Scottish poetic school seeks to assert itself against the literary predominance of the South. One of its leaders I became acquainted with in his summer quarters, charmingly situated on the edge of the rocky coast of St Cyrus, Mr Grieve, who as Hugh M'Diarmid, in his really powerful volumes of poems, Sangschaw and Penny wheep [*sic*] makes the old Scotch live again, which still lives in oral speech, but is dead to literature.[107]

This piece may have been concocted by MacDiarmid as a means of further self-promotion. When Hans Mannhard, whose initials are, mysteriously enough, identical to those of Hugh MacDiarmid's, visited the poet in St Cyrus near Montrose in the summer of 1926, he would have found him in the midst of writing his first epic modernist poem in Scots.

A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle certainly grows out of the local environment in which it was born, placing that provincial milieu within a universalist metaphysic and aligning Scottish culture with international modernism. It still retains the rural setting of the earlier lyrics, as is shown by the fact that the drunk man's boozing buddies, Cruivie and Gilsanquhar, are known by the names of their farms. Similarly, as Robert Crawford has argued of MacDiarmid's early work in general, the poem displays a complicated relationship with Burns, the cult of whom played a prominent part in Montrose life.[108] Both the *Montrose Review* and *Montrose Standard* carried long articles every 25 January detailing the celebrations of the various local Burns

[107] *Montrose Standard*, 19 August 1927, p. 6.
[108] See Crawford, 'MacDiarmid in Montrose', *Locations of Literary Modernism*, p. 48.

clubs on the anniversary of the bard's birthday. Grieve, as a member of the Montrose Burns Club, was very often present at these gatherings, and would usually propose a toast to 'the lasses o''. His strictures against the Burns cult in *A Drunk Man*, therefore, developed out of his lived experience of how Burns's immortal memory was manipulated and exploited: the reports of Burns night in the *Standard* show that even 'the Imperial forces' were toasted in Burns's name.

MacDiarmid castigates his fellow townspeople in the spirit of Burns that he believes these bourgeois to have misappropriated:

> Burns' sentiments o' universal love,
> In pidgin English or in wild-fowl Scots,
> And toastin' ane wha's nocht to them but an
> Excuse for faitherin' Genius wi' *their* thochts.[109]

The drunk man believes that the radical integrity of Burns is what all nations, specifically Scotland, lack in the waste land of 1920s modernity and he calls his spirit back:

> Rabbie, wads't thou wert here – the warld hath need,
> And Scotland mair sae, o' the likes o' thee![110]

If Burns's importance is that of a Christ-like saviour to Scotland and the world, then the Second Coming is MacDiarmid, asserting his almost typological belief that he is 'the likes o' thee'. In a brief introduction to his 1926 Augustan Books of Modern Poetry edition *Robert Burns 1759-1796*, MacDiarmid justifies his selection – 'as difficult a task as this series will encounter' – from Burns's work 'by the fact that my ideas generally coincide with his, especially where these are at odds with conventional opinion'.[111]

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[109] *CP1*, p. 84 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[110] *CP1*, p. 85.
[111] C.M. Grieve, selection for the Augustan Books of Modern Poetry, *Robert Burns 1759-1796* (London: Benn, 1926), p. iii.

In a lecture in Glasgow on Burns night in 1928 under the auspices of the Scottish National Movement, MacDiarmid said that Burns should be forgotten for at least the next quarter of a century. This would help clear a space for MacDiarmid's conception of Scottish cultural rebirth. MacDiarmid criticized what he saw as the negligent attitude of the Burns Federation to new Scottish literature and the manner in which they had attempted to take credit for this revival. He then went on to say that Burns belonged to the past and was not a major influence in European literature, Scotland's poor showing on the map of European culture being in large part due to the anti-literary philistinism of bodies such as the Burns Federation. The speech caused the desired controversy and MacDiarmid gained more publicity. But his general point remains true, that the old does not often greet the new with enthusiasm or alacrity. MacDiarmid himself, towards the end of his life, was disinclined to see merit in the work of 'thae Beatnik poets', such as Edwin Morgan and Ian Hamilton Finlay.[112] His objection to the Burns Federation was that he saw its attitude to cultural and political matters as being reactionary, whereas the political spirit of Burns prefigures MacDiarmid's radical Scottish Republicanism. MacDiarmid believed his politics of place to be the rightful inheritor of the Burnsian legacy.

A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle contains one of the earliest political pieces in MacDiarmid's poetry. The section originally entitled the 'Ballad of the Crucified Rose' (lines 1119-1218) deals in symbolic fashion with the General Strike of May 1926. This national strike in vital industries – such as transport, printing trades (including the press), iron and steel, metals and heavy chemicals groups, building trades, electricity and gas – began at midnight on Monday 3 May. The dispute centred on the question of miners' pay and conditions and escalated to include most other national industries and services. It lasted for nine days of unprecedented industrial

[112] *CP2*, p. 1479 ('Question to Edwin Morgan'); see also *A*, pp. 318-31 ('the ugly bird without wings').

disturbance. MacDiarmid was to remember his experience of the General Strike as it manifested itself in Montrose:

> By that time I wasn't only a town councillor, I was also a Magistrate, and I took a very strong line in regard to that Strike. I was all in favour of it, and we'd pretty well in Forfarshire, that's to say what we call Angus now, we'd pretty well tied up all the roads and everything else, and when the news came through of the betrayal of the Strike by J.H. Thomas, I was actually addressing a meeting of railway men, and when the news came through and I told them what had happened, almost all of them burst out crying. It was a very moving experience and, of course, had the natural effect, as far as I was concerned, of deepening my own feelings in regard to the matter.[113]

The 'Ballad of the Crucified Rose', like some of the early lyrics, uses Christian imagery and mythology, in this case in order to signify the betrayal of the strikers. The red rose that emerges from 'a camsteerie plant' is the organized spirit of radicalism that 'For centuries' had been hidden in the seemingly unpropitious ground – 'yon puir stock' – of the politically disorganized working class.[114] What the plant craves is to take on a more beautiful form, to break from 'The thistle's ugsome guise':

> My nobler instincts sall nae mair
> This contrair shape be gi'en.
> I sall nae mair consent to live
> A life no' fit to be seen.[115]

The plant comes to understand that all that is holding it back from taking on its true shape and colour, that of the red rose of radicalism, is 'some needfu' discipline'.[116] This is what the workers achieve during the General Strike, setting in revolutionary motion the action that will enable them to live to their true spiritual potential:

> A rose loupt oot and grew, until
> It was ten times the size

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[113] *RT3*, p. 572 (*Scottish Marxist*, 1975).
[114] *CP1*, p. 119 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[115] *CP1*, p. 120.
[116] Ibid.

O' ony rose the thistle afore
Had heistit to the skies.[117]

MacDiarmid plays with Burns's sentimental 'A Red, Red Rose', turning it into 'A reid reid rose' of radicalism transmuting 'The hail braid earth'.[118] If Burns's 'Luve' is infinite, strong enough to last until the end of time – 'Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear / And the rocks melt wi' the sun' – then MacDiarmid's red rose of radicalism is powerfully transcendent of the confines of earthly nature:

The waefu' clay was fire aince mair,
As Earth had been resumed
Into God's mind, frae which sae lang
To grugous state 'twas doomed.[119]

As will be illustrated in Chapter Five, MacDiarmid's radicalism is religious in nature, owing much to the spiritual evolutionism of his Calvinist background. As such, the mass of the working class, those who are not of the elect, are damnably flawed and require the leadership of the 'self-elected Elect' such as MacDiarmid.

The failure of the Strike – 'Syne the rose shrivelled suddenly / As a balloon is burst' – is put down to 'A cowardly strain in that lorn growth'.[120] MacDiarmid admits that the flaw that results in the foundering of the strike is congenital to the plant:

The vices that defeat the dream
Are in the plant itsel',
And till they're purged its virtues maun
In pain and misery dwell.[121]

That the plant needs to be 'purged' has an uncomfortably authoritarian resonance that could be interpreted in two seemingly divergent ways. Firstly, that the plant signifies

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[117] *CP1*, p. 120 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[118] Ibid.
[119] Burns, *The Canongate Burns: The Complete Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. Andrew Noble & Patrick Scott Hogg (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p. 412; *CP1*, p. 120.
[120] *CP1*, p. 121 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[121] Ibid.

all humans and the inherent flaw that ensures they and the societies that they build are not perfectible is the original sin of Christian doctrine. MacDiarmid's spiritual communism will purge this sin by aggressively changing human nature. Or secondly, that the plant symbolizes the working class and the failure of radical politics is due to lack of unity and appropriate organization within the Labour Movement, and subsequent betrayal by union leaders such as J.H. Thomas.

This is the argument as George Davie sees it between the anti-Pelagianism of Christianity and the Pelagianism of the Enlightenment. As discussed in Chapter One, Davie places MacDiarmid's work before *To Circumjack Cencrastus* in the former camp, with that poem as the crisis-point of this anti-Pelagian world-view.[122] However, the unifying principle behind MacDiarmid's radical Scottish Republican politics of place attempts to breach the dualisms inherited from the Scottish Enlightenment and heal the dialectical distortions of capitalism. It is impossible, therefore, to split MacDiarmid's work down the middle as Davie does between two ideologies – metaphysical nationalism and materialist communism – that appear to be intractable. Kenneth Buthlay's statement that 'it is rash to give priority to MacD's politics' in 'The Ballad of the Crucified Rose' section of *A Drunk Man* due to its spiritual concerns and Christian symbolism is equally inappropriate.[123]

MacDiarmid himself is unable to prioritize one of these contending positions over the other because for him they are inextricably linked and the precise point of their fusion is political action:

> I refuse to draw a distinction between the material and the spiritual. It requires much closer analysis and as soon as you begin to get to that kind of analysis then you're in the realm of the political.[124]

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[122] See George Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect: The Problem of Generalism and Specialisation in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), Chs. 7 & 8.
[123] Buthlay, ed., *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 91.
[124] *RT3*, p. 590 (Radio Telefis Eirann, 'The Arts: Hammer & Thistle', An Interview with Micheál O hUanacháin, 23 February 1978).

MacDiarmid uses the Christian image of the crucifixion to signify the martyrdom of a potentially radical working class at its own hands – 'And still the idiot nails itsel' / To its ain crucifix' – while 'the Deils', sceptical reactionaries of human nature or Judas-like figures within the working class who have betrayed the Labour Movement for their own thirty pieces of silver, 'rejoice to see the waste'.[125] Christ and Burns from *A Drunk Man* in twenties Montrose, Lenin and Rilke from 'The Seamless Garment' in the thirties – for MacDiarmid, the spiritual and material, the political and poetic, are entirely synchronous: 'The revolutionary spirit's ane wi' spirit itsel'!'.[126]

The drunk man is a revolutionary Christ-figure, martyred by the suffering of excessive self-consciousness and irrationalist intellection, hampered in his mission by national provinciality:

> Is Scotland big enough to be
> A symbol o' that force in me,
> In wha's divine inebriety
> A sicht abune contempt I'll see?[127]

The visionary drunk man sees further than the masses who seem to see nothing at all: 'The less man sees the mair he is / Content wi't'.[128] As such, their lives are spiritually worthless and politically powerless. The drunk man's task is the dual exposure of this damaging material and metaphysical provinciality of vision:

> And never mair a Scot sall tryst,
> Abies on Calvary, wi' Christ,
> Unless, mebbe, a poem like this'll
> Exteriorise things in a thistle[129]

MacDiarmid aims to 'Exteriorise' the metaphysical mysteries of existence and so uncover Scotland's spiritual destiny by refusing the interiorization of linguistic and

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[125] *CP1*, pp. 122, 121 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[126] *CP1*, p. 502 ('Ode to All Rebels').
[127] *CP1*, p. 145 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[128] *CP1*, p. 129.
[129] *CP1*, p. 135.

philosophical Scotticisms encouraged by the Enlightenment. The drunk man asserts an essentially Scottish Republican cast of mind and spirit that radically opposes the 'King and System' of England as something that 'Ootside me lies':

> For I stand still for forces which
> Were subjugated to mak' way
> For England's poo'er, and to enrich
> The kinds o' English, and o' Scots,
> The least congenial to my thoughts.[130]

MacDiarmid's strategic essentializing of nationality, discussed in Chapter One, gives firm basis for resistance to cultural and political subjugation. However, his nationalism ultimately rests on an understanding of the irrational metaphysicality of nationality, an anti-essentializing manoeuvre that seeks to 'unite / Man and the Infinite!':

> He canna see Scotland wha yet
> Canna see the Infinite,
> And Scotland in true scale to it.[131]

The poet-saviour of *A Drunk Man* must renounce Scottishness if his '*sacrifice*' for the nation is to be worthy of his infinite vision: '*gin ye'd see / Anither category ye / Maun tine your nationality*'.[132] The poet transcends the one-dimensionality of a falsely materialist, earthbound nation in order to save his people, freeing them to a true metaphysical Scotland. MacDiarmid understands that there can be no inclusive nationalism without the ability to transcend such imagined communities and perceive the nation in international and metaphysical terms:

> I wad ha'e Scotland to my eye
> Until I saw a timeless flame
> Tak' Auchtermuchty for a name,
> And kent that Ecclefechan stood

[130] *CP1*, p. 157 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[131] *CP1*, p. 98, 162.
[132] *CP1*, p. 165.

As pairt o' an eternal mood.[133]

It is telling that modernist mystic MacDiarmid seeks to eternalize small-town Scotland, such as Victorian visionary Carlyle's Ecclefechan. *A Drunk Man* also metaphysically memorializes provincial Montrose.

A Drunk Man grows from the local, extends to the national, interfuses this with a leaven of internationalism through engagement with various foreign authors, and ends up in the realms of the metaphysical. In this respect, the poem resembles the structure of Edwin Muir's *Latitudes* (1924) which begins with essays on Burns, the Scottish Ballads and George Douglas, moves on to consider Conrad, Dostoevsky, Ibsen and Nietzsche, before concluding with the metaphysical questioning of chapters such as 'Beyond the Absolute' and 'On the Universe'.[134]

MacDiarmid approved of Muir's work in the 1920s, believing him to be 'a pan-European intervening in the world-debate on its highest plane' whose modernist credentials had 'lifted him out of our Scottish provincialism'.[135] While in Montrose, 'working out his essays on contemporary literature in an age of transition', Muir was depressed at 'the flatness of people's minds' in the town, preferring 'the responses of a cultivated environment' such as he and his wife Willa found in their Continental excursions.[136] In 1927, writing from Menton on the Côte d'Azur, Muir hopes that 'the Scottish Republic comes about: it would make Scotland worth living in'.[137] However, by 1931 – the year in which he wrote an essay, requested by MacDiarmid, for the *Free Man* called 'The Functionlessness of Scotland' – he could say 'that Scotland's

[133] *CP1*, p. 144 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[134] See Edwin Muir, *Latitudes* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1924).
[135] *CSS*, pp. 93, 100 ('Edwin Muir').
[136] Willa Muir, *Belonging: A Memoir* (London: Hogarth, 1968), pp. 115, 114, 114.
[137] Muir, *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, ed. P.H. Butter (London: Hogarth, 1964), p. 64 (to George Thorburn, 14 May 1927).

historical destiny is to eliminate itself in reality' and that 'there's no Scotland in the same sense that there is an England and a France'.[138]

Both poets belonged to the margins: Muir the Orcadian, who never really considered himself to be Scots and whose *Scottish Journey* (1935) records the industrial Fall from Orcadian Eden; MacDiarmid the Borderer, who fought to reconstruct a nationality that he believed could still have an important international function.[139] Friends and fellow Nietzscheans in the twenties, they later found divergent faiths – Muir in Christianity, MacDiarmid in a spiritualized communism. However, it is their respective politics of place that most separates them.

From similar beginnings and both recoiling from the industrialism of urban centres, these rural, small-town autodidacts dealt with the cultural and political claims of capitalist cosmopolitanism in opposed ways, Muir's anglophilic 'milk-and-water mysticism', his interest in inner, spiritual place, a betrayal to MacDiarmid, who remained committed to the specifically Scottish connection between the local, the international and the metaphysical:

> *For freedom means that a lad or lass*
> *In Cupar or elsewhaur yet*
> *May alter the haill o' human thocht*
> *Mair than Christ's altered it.*[140]

MacDiarmid's activities in Montrose epitomize this universalist-local engagement. He managed to combine various different interests, occupations and ideals, helping to create cultural and political movements that still resound with great influence into the present. His radical Scottish Republican politics of place connect the local and national environment to wider, international concerns by unifying socialism and

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[138] Muir, *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, p. 71 (to George Thorburn, 14 May 1927); see *Edwin Muir: Uncollected Scottish Criticism*, ed. Andrew Noble (London & Totowa, NJ: Vision and Barnes & Noble, 1982), ch. 1: 'The Functionlessness of Scotland'.

[139] 'I'm not Scotch, I'm an Orkney man, a good Scandinavian, and my true country is Norway, or Denmark, or Iceland, or some place like that', Muir, *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, p. 64.

[140] *LP*, p. 203; *CP1*, p. 257 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).

Scottish nationalism. And he wrote poetry in Scots of tenderness, speculation, ferocity, humour and beauty.

MacDiarmid's job with the *Montrose Review* placed him at the hub of the town's affairs, allowing him the intimate connection with a community from which his best poetry in Scots grows and enabling his propaganda efforts for Scottish Renaissance to find greater scope than would have been possible in the isolation of Whalsay or in a larger, more dispersed, less easy to dominate urban environment – perhaps one reason why the egotistical MacDiarmid never prospered in cities, and why his manifesto-mad practical activities in twenties Montrose shrink substantially in Shetland. This point is confirmed retrospectively from 'Montrose' of 1961, MacDiarmid writing that the town 'has the right size too – not a huge / Sprawling mass' so 'it is possible to know / Everyone in it'.[141] Lacking a university education, MacDiarmid may have struggled to find work on a national newspaper, whereas a provincial press is keener to find inexperienced journalists it can mould to its local requirements. However, as this chapter has tried to show, MacDiarmid reversed these terms, availing himself of the provincial *Review* to further his internationalist designs for the national movement.

If his job kept him up-to-the-mark with political concerns, allowing him the better to dictate their Scottish tenor, it also gave him scope for critical evaluation of contemporary books. MacDiarmid was never slow to see the value of good criticism to the growth of literature and culture and his job at the *Montrose Review* included the opportunity to act as critic and book reviewer, allowing this autodidact crucial access to the latest books and knowledge of ideological and artistic trends. One of the first pieces of note to be gleaned from the *Review* in this respect does not involve books, however, but the increasingly popular attraction of the Talkies.

[141] *CP2*, p. 1407 ('Montrose').

MacDiarmid was not an early fan of this populist medium, understanding cinema to be a capitalist ruse to ensure that the masses remained decently stupid.[142] Writing for *Vox* after leaving Montrose in 1929, MacDiarmid believed that 'the films have a thorough grip of the masses'; as such, we should 'debate the ways and means by which the cultural effects of the cinema can or should be controlled or its artistic standards raised', adding his elitist mantra: 'Good literature – good art – appeals to and is sustained by [...] small fractions of the public. The cinema has a virtual monopoly of the remainder'.[143]

An article from the *Review* of 26 March 1920 entitled 'Film Propaganda In Montrose' projects a typically MacDiarmidian line that the 'habit of picture-going is closely associated with the most vital educational, ethical, and cultural problems'.[144] The writer goes on:

> The cinema has beyond question become for good or ill the principal agent in the formation of public opinion, and the manner in which its influence is exercised should be the subject of continual critical examination. The chief danger lies in the fact that the opinions it creates, the sentiments it encourages, are for the most part assimilated unconsciously and are not thrashed out. That the mass of impressions and conceptions thus acquired by the picture-going public should be searchingly 'canalised' is imperative.[145]

That this is probably from MacDiarmid's pen is illustrated by the hectoring tone of elitist intellectual rectitude.

Such an authoritative voice can also be heard in a review of Rudolf Steiner's *The Threefold State*. Steiner posits the idea that the structure of the State must be altered in order to transform the increasingly chaotic world that confronts the survivors of the

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[142] See, however, *A*, p. 98 ('Aesthetics in Scotland') for the marxist MacDiarmid's view in 1950 that 'the cinema is both a science and an art, and therefore the most characteristic expression of our time'.
[143] *RT2*, p.76 ('The Film Finds its Tongue').
[144] *Montrose Review*, 26 March 1920, p. 7.
[145] Ibid.

First World War. He calls for religious thinking to be combined with social practice. The reviewer agrees that

> What was of service in 1914 is no longer serviceable. New horizons have come into our ken. A new orientation is manifesting itself in every department of life. Every school of thought, political, philosophical, or practical, is recognising in increasing measure the extent to which the Great [War] has transvaluated all values, and rendered essential a restatement of principles and policies in the light of its overwhelming experiences.[146]

Such were the ideas that MacDiarmid brought back from his own experience of war. They informed the spirit of modernism and were with MacDiarmid from his very first work.

In 'A Four Years' Harvest', a short story about the Great War from *Annals of the Five Senses* (1923) – MacDiarmid's first book and published under his real name – we find an autobiographical character for whom

> Old ideas, old standards were inevitably judged with an acrid bitterness which sought to destroy and to cast into oblivion the oldest and most respected of human institutions – anything, if war be made impossible.[147]

The literate soldier of this story understands that 'Book after book was coming out now on this theme, each in its own way, according to the temperament of the author, formulating an indictment of modern society'.[148] MacDiarmid's radical politics contribute to this 'indictment of modern society' as does the reviewer's concluding appraisal of Steiner's book:

> The deadweight of indifference hangs as a millstone about the necks of those who would essay a sane and evolutionary solution. Dr Steiner is well aware of the type of people who are so obstructive that social dynamite is necessary to remove them from the path of progress. They exist in Montrose no less than in Vienna. Our local churches know them as intimately as the congregation of Europe.[149]

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[146] *Montrose Review*, 23 April 1920, p. 2
[147] *Annals*, p. 44.
[148] Ibid.
[149] *Montrose Review*, 23 April 1920, p. 2.

An 'evolutionary solution' suggests MacDiarmid's spiritual evolutionism which finds its apotheosis in the poet's communism, an ideology requiring the 'social dynamite' of violent political action to clear 'the path of progress'. Both the cinema article and the Steiner review combine an ethical imperative with an authoritarian modernist impetus to mould public behaviour and consciousness characteristic of MacDiarmid's relation to the hollow men of the masses. If MacDiarmid wrote them, he certainly made sure in his first period in the town that he introduced himself to Montrose with a bang, not a whimper.

Much of MacDiarmid's reviewing, such as the examples given above, is polemical. Instead of reviewing the book in question MacDiarmid will give you his own opinion on the matter, which will usually include a wake-up call to his less enlightened readers. This is true of a review of *The Historical Saint Columba* by W. Douglas Simpson. The article begins with the idea of the need for regeneration that characterizes the previous examples; only here it specifically applies to the national culture:

> Scottish history is in the process to-day of being completely re-written. The researches of specialists in many different directions have shown the necessity for this. Concurrently there is an increasing demand for the better and fuller teaching of Scottish history in Scottish schools – but the material is not available for the purpose. A Committee recently set up by the Glasgow Branch of the Educational Institute of Scotland has reported that not one of the text-books dealing with Scottish history which are in use in the Glasgow schools can be considered satisfactory. This is presumably a statement that has in view merely the view of Scottish history that is now held by ordinary teachers of history, and is not derived from any anticipation of the new view that is being steadily built up by contemporary research. How much further 'off the mark' therefore must these text-books be from any standpoint that includes the latter![150]

The book being reviewed is actually about the part played by St Columba in the evangelization of Scotland, but the article is mostly propaganda for the Scottish

[150] *Montrose Review*, 24 June 1927, p. 3.

Renaissance efforts to 'ensure that the study of Scottish history occupies a position as honourable as that of English history' in Scottish schools.[151] However, the reviewer does not think that Dr Simpson has been up to the task involved in writing his history:

> The author is unfortunately more of a controversialist than a historian. It is very questionable whether he is adequately equipped for the complete discharge of his task, or has been able to undertake the vast amount of original research required. How much of the material is accepted at second-hand? How much of the volume represents merely an ingenious collocation of passages from all manner of existing books bearing on the matter in one way or another.[152]

The reviewer's description of Simpson's book also happens to be a very good description of some of MacDiarmid's writing. However, the article displays the impressive singularity of purpose that would seek to establish a new Scotland imbuing much of MacDiarmid's work in Montrose.

In the same year that Grieve turned down the candidacy of the Labour Party for the county of Banffshire in order to concentrate on the nationalist cause, an interesting article appeared in the *Montrose Review* of 2 November 1928. Entitled 'Braid Scots Verse', it is a review of a book of poems by Jean Baxter called *A' A'e 'Oo'* (a phrase recurring in 'The Seamless Garment') that continues the MacDiarmidian strategy of deprecating what he saw as the values of the old Scotland:

> These sentimental, reminiscential, and moralising verses are in the Kailyard tradition, and Mrs Baxter contributes nothing new in technique, language or subject matter. Dr J.M. Bulloch makes a mountain out of a molehill in his preface; but his side-fling at 'synthetic Scots' and his superfluous anxiety to disassociate Mrs Baxter from any undue intellectuality or concern with purely literary values, shows, at all events, his recognition that the work of the new school of Scots poets is poles apart from the kind of thing he is sponsoring here. The fact that the official Vernacular movement is thirled to verse of this sort would amply justify the hope expressed by Dr Kitchin, of Edinburgh University, that 'the whole thing might die out quietly' – were it not that, outwith the Burns Movement, very different and vital ideas are held in the field. It is not too much to say that Dr Bullock and his associates,

[151] *RT2*, p. 157 ('Starving the Records: why we have no Scottish histories').
[152] *Montrose Review*, 24 June 1927, p. 3.

> in so far from representing a Vernacular Revival Movement, are impeding the revival which is actually taking place by their own lack of understanding of the forces at work and the extent to which they are confusing the issue in the public mind and foisting forward work of this description as representative of modern Scots literature.[153]

Clearly stung by Dr Bulloch's criticism of synthetic Scots, MacDiarmid goes on all out attack. Coming in the year that MacDiarmid takes up the nationalist political cause, this review encapsulates many of his activities in Montrose: a desire to supersede the kailyard verse of Braid Scots, and the parochial values it reflects, with a modernist synthetic Scots that is internationalist in its designs for Scotland; the propagandistic use of a provincial press to broadcast the aims of the new Scottish movement in culture and politics; and the will to achieve this from the seemingly marginal location of a small Scottish town, emphasizing his anti-metropolitan credo that 'Man's story owes more to little towns that to great'.[154]

MacDiarmid left Montrose after nine years of constant and interrelated activity on several different fronts on 9 September 1929 in order to work for Compton Mackenzie's *Vox* in London. He had been chafing against the confines of life in a provincial town for some time, complaining in letters to George Ogilvie that 'I can't get out of Montrose, though, do what I will, but I loathe my work here' and even more tellingly,

> I am really feeling the need now, for diverse reasons, of getting into a city and have during the past year tried to do so in all sorts of ways – but without success. I'm beginning to get desperate for I don't want to have to reconcile myself to Montrose – or the likes of Montrose – for good.[155]

Such frustration at the confines of small-town life is reflected in the 'Frae Anither Window in Thrums' section of *To Circumjack Cencrastus*. The title is

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[153] *Montrose Review*, 2 November 1928, p. 6.
[154] *CP2*, p. 1407 ('Montrose').
[155] *L*, p. 86 (to George Ogilvie [Nov 1925] dated by ed.); pp. 9-12 (to George Ogilvie, 6 August 1926).

borrowed from William McCance's painting 'From Another Window in Thrums' (1928), a modernist translation of J.M. Barrie's *A Window in Thrums* (1889). Thrums is a fictionalization of Barrie's birthplace, the small Angus town of Kirriemuir, his novel exemplifying the characteristics of the kailyard school which MacDiarmid and his Scottish Renaissance confreres sought to usurp from its place of populist precedence. (MacDiarmid's friend R.B. Cunninghame Graham said of Barrie and his imitators that 'If it pleases the Kailyarders to represent half of the population of their native land as imbeciles the fault is theirs'.)[156] Tom Normand appositely links the appearance of McCance's painting in 1928 with the foundation of the National Party of Scotland in the same year, believing 'From Another Window in Thrums' to be 'an inventive, subtle, ironic, and sceptical critique of the received vision of Scotland and Scottish culture'.[157]

MacDiarmid includes an article from 1925 on 'William and Agnes M'Cance' in *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, approving of their artistic 'ultra-modern tendencies' and believing the work of husband and wife to be 'in accordance with a new or renewed realisation of fundamental elements of distinctive Scottish psychology'.[158] The nationalist essentialism of MacDiarmid's Renaissance modernism sought to reverse 'the permanent provincialism of our country' by attacking the cultural and political values of a kailyard that had retarded the true Scotland.[159] Walter Perrie sees MacDiarmid as an internationalist stifled by the kailyard values of Montrose:

> He hated Montrose and tried to find work in a more congenial, less provincial, environment but with little success. Montrose, a small town in Scotland still thirled, as Grieve saw it, to the cultural values of the Kailyard and suffering in its social and political life from the joint domination of the Kirk and English bourgeois hegemony, must have provided fertile soil for a

[156] Thomas Moult, *Barrie* (London: Cape, 1928), p. 80.
[157] Tom Normand, *The Modern Scot: Modernism and Nationalism in Scottish Art 1928-1955* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 7.
[158] *CSS*, p. 187 ('William and Agnes M'Cance').
[159] *CSS*, p. 188.

> good crop of discontent from someone whose ambitions lay in the direction of a highly intellectual poetry of European directions.[160]

'Frae Anither Window in Thrums' confirms Perrie's view. The section begins 'in the hauf licht' and continues to damningly reiterate the lack of vision of this parochial environment: 'Here in the daurk'; 'Grey glumshin' o' the window here'; and 'The difference 'twixt the few and mony / In this puir licht seems sma' if ony'.[161] MacDiarmid's poet is slumped in such spiritual torpor that he calls to mind Dostoevsky's Stavrogin –

> Wan as Dostoevski
> Glowered through a wudden dream to find
> Stavrogin in the corners o' his mind

– a nihilistic revolutionary in *The Devils* (1871), or *The Possessed*, who preaches contradictory ideologies, sees suicide as the ultimate expression of the will and, when love fails to redeem him, hangs himself.[162] One of Stavrogin's many difficulties in the face of life is metaphysical boredom, an acedia that MacDiarmid's poet seems only too able to understand as he stares out of the office-window of the *Review* onto a kailyard scene loaded with unbearable inanity. The restrictions of family life ('weans clamourin' to be fed'), the mundanity of his job ('this accursed drudgery'), and the philistinism of his boss ('Curse his new hoose, his business, his cigar') add to the poet's gloom, as he sits 'in the dark / 'Huntin' like Moses for the vital spark' of creativity:

> Thrang o' ideas that like fairy gowd
> 'll leave me the 'Review' reporter still
> Waukenin' to my clung-kite faimly on a hill
> O' useless croftin' whaur naething's growed
> But Daith, sin Christ for an idea died

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[160] Walter Perrie, *Out of Conflict* (Dunfermline: Borderline Press, 1982), p. 16.
[161] *CP1*, pp. 230, 232, 233 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[162] *CP1*, p. 230.

On a gey similar but less heich hillside.[163]

Such negative summary of provincial Montrose, coming at the end of his decade in the town, implies MacDiarmid's frustrated desire to transform the values of a community that both nourished and troubled his creative capacity. However, MacDiarmid's period in the town was one of his most productive. It was here that he found 'the true language o' my thochts' by writing in Scots, producing the beautiful concision of the Scots lyrics and the lengthy modernist metaphysics of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*.[164] The level of energy involved in MacDiarmid's political work in Montrose is also inspiring. His industry as a socialist councillor and his part in helping to found the National Party of Scotland in 1928 displays a commitment to local and national democracy that is particularly prominent in his Montrose period. Other activities to help promote the cultural and political life of the nation, such as establishing periodicals like the *Scottish Nation* and *Scottish Chapbook*, show equal dedication and enthusiasm.

Considering the scale of his operations, MacDiarmid must be slightly disingenuous when writing to Pittendrigh Macgillivray in 1925: 'I even sacrificed my own career – staying so long down here on a little local paper, simply because it gave me more leisure for my efforts on behalf of Scottish nationalism and letters.'[165] His work for the *Montrose Review* and *Montrose Standard* demonstrates the extent to which MacDiarmid engaged with the community in which he lived, continually attempting to bring wider concerns to bear within the local purlieu through his journalism – 'After all my journalistic instinct *is* part of my life and has been a very

[163] *CP1*, pp. 237, 237, 235, 235, 237 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[164] *CP1*, p. 239.
[165] *L*, p. 313 (to Pittendrigh Macgillivray, 10 February 1925).

important and indeed deterministic part of it' – and using this to attempt internationalist reconstruction of the national stage.[166]

It is characteristic of the international modernism to which MacDiarmid so splendidly contributed in the 1920s that its cosmopolitanism cannot survive without the amalgam of influences emerging principally from the so-called peripheries. In the 'devil's decade' of the thirties MacDiarmid moved to the isolated Shetland island of Whalsay from where he produced half of his collected poetry and first gave theoretical voice to his radical Scottish Republicanism, a combination of international socialism and Scottish nationalism that finds more practical application in Montrose. Just as with his period in Montrose, however, the geopolitical marginality of Whalsay did nothing to dim the radical fire of MacDiarmid's cultural and political internationalism.

[166] *NSL*, p. 123 (to Valda Grieve, [1936] dated by eds.).

Chapter 3 THE DEVIL'S DECADE

> The nineteen-thirties have been called the black years, the devil's decade. Its popular image can be expressed in two phrases: mass unemployment and 'appeasement'. No set of political leaders have been judged so contemptuously since the days of Lord North.[1]

> British civilization does not know what to do with the lonely places[2]

MacDiarmid spent most of the 1920s living and working in Montrose, a town seemingly peripheral from the concerns of literary modernism that became the focal point of a Scottish cultural renaissance. The poet wrote much of his most important work there, but after almost a decade's employment with the *Montrose Review*, and the incipient break up of his marriage to Peggy, he needed fresh challenges in a new environment. On leaving Montrose for London in September 1929 to work for Compton Mackenzie's *Vox*, MacDiarmid couldn't have imagined that his home for most of the 1930s would not be 'the enemy capital', but a place even more remote from the metropolitan political and cultural centre than the Angus town.[3]

Using uncollected newspaper material from the *Shetland Times* and the *Shetland News*, this chapter will examine the work that issues from MacDiarmid's time in Whalsay, placing it and the poet's political commitments within the historical framework of the 1930s. It will argue that with the loss of practical involvement in the life of a local community MacDiarmid develops a mystical Celtic communism eccentric to the stance of metropolitan intellectuals in this decade of civilizational crisis. However, if twenties Montrose is the centre of Scottish Renaissance, where the poet begins in practice to unify Scottish nationalism and international socialism, then

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[1] A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 317.
[2] *LP*, p. 215.
[3] *NSL*, p. 414 (to Edward Lucie-Smith, 29 November 1965).

thirties Whalsay sees MacDiarmid look towards a new Scotland. The poet's autodidactic generalism, drawn from the traditions of a metaphysical Scotland retrieved by MacDiarmid in Montrose, uncovers a John Maclean-inspired radical Scottish Republican tradition that gives theoretical balance to the poet's politics of place. The chapter contends that despite his interest in an authoritarian ideology such as communism, MacDiarmid's nationalist Gaelic Idea promotes the virtues of cultural and political autonomy (for Shetland and Scotland) and the individual and civilizational benefits of difference.

MacDiarmid arrived in Whalsay in May 1933 after a short spell living in England (London, Liverpool, Thakeham in Sussex). Alan Bold describes the place that was to be his home for the next nine years:

> Whalsay ('whale island'), lying on the east side of the Shetland Mainland, measures less than six miles from the south-west to the north-east and has a maximum breadth of just over two miles. At the time of MacDiarmid's arrival it had a population of around nine hundred and was dependent on haddock and herring fishing, industries in decline. As an illuminating expression, collected by MacDiarmid, has it, 'the Orcadian is a farmer with a boat, the Shetlander is a fisherman with a croft'. The fisherman-crofters had to endure considerable hardship on Whalsay: they had no lighting, sewage, rubbish disposal or other public services and most of the roads were in an atrocious condition. By contrast, W.A. Bruce, the laird of Whalsay, lived in style at Symbister House. Politically, MacDiarmid saw Whalsay as a microcosm of an unjust society.[4]

The ancestors of the Bruce family who MacDiarmid knew and socialized with at Symbister House, a large Georgian granite-built mansion, 'gained possession of Whalsay from its cofter-owners and brought in a period of harsh rule. In the 19th century the punishment for any small misdemeanour was exile from the island'.[5] Although such severe class rule was no longer in place by the time of MacDiarmid's arrival in the 1930s, some of the older residents would still bow when they met the

[4] Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 285.
[5] Hamish Haswell-Smith, *The Scottish Islands: A Comprehensive Guide to Every Scottish Island* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), p. 373.

gentry. Indeed, it was 1946 before there was no separate table for 'da gentry' at the celebration of a local wedding.[6] Those who were considered to be part of the gentry circle of Whalsay included the laird Bruce and his wife Elizabeth, who was the sister of Professor Herbert Grierson, MacDiarmid's nationalist friend Dr David Orr, the minister, teachers, shopkeepers, and even clerks of the local council. It was this group that MacDiarmid socialized with when he chose, somewhat infrequently, to mix, despite the radical politics encapsulated in 'To Any Scottish Laird' from 1932:

> Your land? You fool, it hauds nae beast
> Or bird or troot or tree or weed
> If they kent you as owner but
> 'Ud leave it empty as your heid.[7]

The poet's socializing with the 'gentry' of Whalsay prompts Brian Smith to state that 'MacDiarmid's communism was a pose' which the islanders were well able to see through: 'The people of Whalsay were never under any illusions about MacDiarmid's political or social affiliations. They regarded him as a member of what they called "da Gentry circle" in the island.'[8] Such literalism misapprehends rather than invalidates MacDiarmid's radical republicanism. Notorious amongst the Whalsay people for his anti-royalism, he was also interested in the economic difficulties facing Shetland as a whole.[9]

In an essay from 1934, 'Life in the Shetland Islands', he claims that Shetland is 'fighting [...] a losing battle' in attempting to retain traditional living and work practices:

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[6] Information gathered from interviews of Whalsay residents in 1991 by Loretta Hutchison and Jacqueline Irvine of Whalsay History Group, Whalsay, Shetland (courtesy of Jacqueline Irvine).
[7] *CP2*, p. 1253 ('To Any Scottish Laird').
[8] Brian Smith, 'Writing about MacDiarmid in Shetland', *The New Shetlander*, 212, (2000), Lerwick, Shetland Council of Social Services, p. 11.
[9] See Whalsay History Group for MacDiarmid's anti-royalism.

> The fishing, upon which they principally depend, is in a bad way; the population is rapidly declining; crofts are falling into desuetude and the ground is being increasingly acquired by big sheep-farmers.[10]

Despite the geographical isolation of Shetland, the propensity of international capitalism to dissolve local difference cannot be held at bay. However, MacDiarmid is optimistic that Shetland can recover through the development of its untapped economic and cultural potential. Perhaps surprisingly, he recommends the stimulation of tourism – that postmodern simulacrum of the history of place – as a root to recovery:

> It is all the more regrettable that so few holiday-makers come to the Shetlands since the essence of a holiday is a complete change, and this the Shetland Islands offer to mainland dwellers to a far greater extent than is obtainable anywhere else within easy reach, which is to say, at moderate cost. Superficially even, the Shetlands are quite unlike Scotland, and, unless the visitor has been prepared in advance, he or she may find it difficult to account for the sense of something very different [11]

It may be argued that tourism disguises the genuine culture of place through the use of a reductionist, but commercially profitable, native stereotyping: witness the tantanry used to promote Scotland's largest industry.[12] However, MacDiarmid calls for Shetlanders to find their real identity in much the same way that facilitated the resurgence of the Faroe Islands:

> The Faroes did this by breaking off alien ties opposed to their true national development; and by putting their activities once more upon their natural basis and developing them in accordance with the dictates of a true local economy, they have risen to their present healthy and happy condition.[13]

The phrase 'breaking off alien ties opposed to their true national development' is a succinct summation of MacDiarmid's essentialist Scottish nationalist credo. In this

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[10] *SP*, p. 88 ('Life in the Shetland Islands').
[11] *SP*, pp. 94-5.
[12] See McCrone, Morris and Kiely, *Scotland – the Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999; 1995) for an examination of heritage tourism in Scotland.
[13] *SP*, p. 97 ('Life in the Shetland Islands').

sense, Shetland was something of a test case for MacDiarmid's Douglasite economic dream for Scotland:

> Given the measure of independence they have, the island economy is in curiously surreptitious enjoyment of a measure of Douglasism – of economic nationalism within the present framework of international interdependence and high finance.[14]

The Social Credit proposals of Major C.H. Douglas held some appeal for anti-liberal modernists in the twenties and thirties such as Ezra Pound and MacDiarmid, looking to break the power of the banks in the capitalist system:

> Shall the evolution of mankind be stayed,
> As the sun was once stayed in the skies,
> By a banking system that from its lying books
> Refuses to lift its eyes?[15]

MacDiarmid regarded Douglas as being 'probably the only Scotsman who has inspired a world movement'.[16]

The correspondence page of the *Shetland Times*, the Liberal paper as opposed to the Tory *Shetland News*, held a long-running debate during 1934 as to the merits of Social Credit and whether or not the theory is compatible with the tenets of socialism. Surprisingly, despite his interest in and approval of Douglas, the socialist MacDiarmid did not contribute to what he perhaps saw as no more than epistolary skirmishes. However, leaving Douglas out of the equation, what 'Life in the Shetland Islands' illustrates is that the ardent regionalism MacDiarmid practised in Montrose applies also to his theorizing of Shetland:

> They [Shetlanders] have a real autonomy in basic matters; so they refuse to respond to any denunciation of that centralization of their affairs in London which in all other matters stultifies their local initiative. 'Faithful in small

[14] *SP*, p. 90 ('Life in the Shetland Islands').
[15] *CP1*, p. 404 ('Genethliacon for the New World Order').
[16] *L*, p. 516 (to Robin Richardson, 2 October 1952).

> things', they are not to be shaken in their allegiance to them by hopes that they could do as well in greater.[17]

Living in what appears to be a self-imposed internal exile on an island at the extreme geographical edge of Western Europe, the internationalist MacDiarmid reaffirms his belief in the civilizational importance of the peripheries.

MacDiarmid's time in Whalsay corresponded with a period of crisis in his personal life. The Grieves had little money as the poet had no regular income. Given the family's poverty, the fact that MacDiarmid did not work was a source of bewilderment to some of the islanders: 'He wis a very clever man – but he did nae right work un dey wir just fantin.'[18] That they were 'fantin', or starving, and had no regular income meant that they existed on handouts from the islanders: 'Dey wid nivver have survived without da kindness a folk. Dey owed money ta some aa shops.'[19] They were also permanently behind in the payment of rent to the laird, as a 1940 letter from MacDiarmid to Bruce illustrates. Enclosing rent of £2 12s MacDiarmid writes, 'I am sorry that owing to the effect of war-time conditions on my work this payment is so long overdue.'[20] Given that MacDiarmid's rent for the house at Sodom was roughly 27s a year, this payment represents two years rent and means he was almost a year overdue: Bruce wouldn't have had rent from MacDiarmid since 1938. Self-imposed it may have been, but MacDiarmid's impecuniousness while on Whalsay in the 1930s mirrored the financial distress in Britain and internationally.

For some of MacDiarmid's period on Whalsay work would have been difficult given the precarious state of his health. The poet had a complete breakdown in 1935 that necessitated his admittance to Gilgal Nursing Home in Perthshire. The cause of MacDiarmid's illness has been difficult to define. Bold cites the 'strict rule of

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[17] *SP*, pp. 91-2 ('Life in the Shetland Islands').
[18] Whalsay History Group.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Letter from MacDiarmid to W.A. Bruce of Symbister, 2 August 1940 (Shetland Archives, Lerwick).

confidentiality' of the Murray Royal Hospital, of which Gilgal was an annexe for psychiatric patients, as being the major stumbling-block to biographical enlightenment.[21] However, it is just as likely that Bold's own observance of privacy has obscured the issue. Recent research, resulting in *New Selected Letters* (2001), has uncovered evidence that MacDiarmid may have been syphilitic. In an almost Nervalian letter from Gilgal to his second wife Valda, MacDiarmid writes:

> With regard to Peggy and you suspecting my trouble, you could not possibly – for I had no suspicion of it myself, never a single moment's [*sic*], and no reason to have any. I knew that in 1915 I'd a slight dose of Gon. [gonorrhoea] I'd driven underground with violent boozing and that I'd no notion where it had gone – but there is no proven case of suppressed Gon. turning into Syph. [syphilis] and of Syph. I never had the slightest sign – chancre, rash, etc., all of which are invariably present. So how on earth could I suspect?[22]

A very different MacDiarmid emerges from *New Selected Letters.* This collection is of a more private nature and reveals details of MacDiarmid's personal life that Bold may not have wanted to release in his *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* (1984), especially while some of the main protagonists addressed in the letters were still alive.

Alongside the economic and health problems suffered by MacDiarmid while resident on Whalsay, we find in the poetry evidence of what Alan Riach has called 'a crisis of the spirit'.[23] 'On a Raised Beach' synthesizes the barrenness of the treeless Shetland landscape with the asceticism of MacDiarmid's metaphysic. The poem was inspired by an almost certainly fictional three-day stay alone on the uninhabited island of West Linga, with its raised beach at Croo Wick, an island west of Whalsay that could be seen from MacDiarmid's cottage.[24] However, with his increasing partiality for the factual and scientific, MacDiarmid may have drawn greater creative sustenance from the geological survey of 1933 conducted by district geologist G.V. Wilson and

[21] Bold, *MacDiarmid*, p. 334.
[22] *NSL*, p. 100 (to Valda Grieve, 20 September [1935] dated by eds.).
[23] Riach, *SP*, p. 85.
[24] See Liv Kjørsvik Schei and Gunnie Moberg, *The Shetland Story* (London: Batsford, 1988), p. 225.

five-strong team as they strove to establish the geological composition and age of each part of Shetland, affectionately known to expatriates as the Old Rock.[25] Whalsay and West Linga are composed mainly of gneiss and schist with some intrusions of granite and are over 420 million years old.[26]

Such scientific findings would have appealed to MacDiarmid's materialist theory of the earth, his desire in 'On a Raised Beach' to 'get into this stone world now'.[27] Stripped of any faith save in the most elemental of things, this atheist poem dismantles all false transcendental Romanticism and yet attempts to reconnect the severed subject-object relationship:

> My disposition is towards spiritual issues
> Made inhumanly clear; I will have nothing interposed
> Between my sensitiveness and the barren but beautiful reality;
> The deadly clarity of this 'seeing of a hungry man'
> Only traces of a fever passing over my vision
> Will vary, troubling it indeed, but troubling it only
> In such a way that it becomes for a moment
> Superhumanly, menacingly clear – the reflection
> Of a brightness through a burning crystal.[28]

The poet of 'On a Raised Beach' resembles Chris at the conclusion of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Grey Granite* (1934), divested of any further interest in human relations, merging back into the abiding land that gave her birth. Gibbon's novel is dedicated to MacDiarmid and appeared in the same year as *Stony Limits and Other Poems*, which includes 'On a Raised Beach'.

Grey Granite delineates a disordered and poverty-stricken urban environment; MacDiarmid's poem an infertile, largely uninhabited rural landscape. Yet, despite these differences, both make ample use of stone imagery in order to illuminate the absolutist political temper of the times. Chris's son Ewan, who has had an interest in

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[25] See *Shetland Times*, 16 June 1934, p. 7
[26] See James R. Nicolson, *Shetland* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1972), p. 19.
[27] *CP1*, p. 426 ('On a Raised Beach').
[28] *CP1*, p. 431; see D.M. MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 164-70 for a brief discussion of 'On a Raised Beach' as an atheist poem.

prehistoric stones since childhood and is described as being like grey granite, becomes a communist. MacDiarmid's atheist poem, with its acceptance of the stones can – despite, or perhaps because of, its mystical nature – be described as one of his communist poems:

> Thinking of all the higher zones
> Confronting the spirit of man I know they are bare
> Of all so-called culture as any stone here;
> Not so much of all literature survives
> As any wisp of scriota that thrives
> On a rock – (interesting though it may seem to be
> As de Bary's and Schwendener's discovery
> Of the dual nature of lichens, the partnership,
> Symbiosis, of a particular fungus and particular alga).
> These bare stones bring me straight back to reality.
> I grasp one of them and I have in my grip
> The beginning and the end of the world,
> My own self, and as before I never saw
> The empty hand of my brother man,
> The humanity no culture has reached, the mob.
> Intelligentsia, our impossible and imperative job![29]

This understanding that the culture-less masses are as integral to the life of humanity as the stones are to enduring Creation is reminiscent of Ewan's experience in the Museum Galleries in *Grey Granite* where he discovers the sublimated, above-stairs nature of cultural artefacts:

> You went and sat down in the Italian room, on the bench in the middle, and stared at a picture, couldn't be bothered to find out the painter, group of Renaissance people somewhere: soldiers, a cardinal an angel or so, and a throng of keelies cheering like hell about nothing at all – in the background, as usual. Why not a more typical Italian scene! – a man being broken on the wheel with a club, mashed and smashed till his chest caved in, till his bones were a blood-clottered powdery mess?[30]

Gibbon and MacDiarmid disagreed on the ultimate worth of culture in the face of the effort to raise levels of material existence, the former stating that 'There is nothing

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[29] *CP1*, pp. 431-2 ('On a Raised Beach').
[30] Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair* (London: Penguin, 1986; 1946), p. 407.

in culture and art that is worth the life and elementary happiness of one of those thousands who rot in the Glasgow slums', while the MacDiarmid of 'Ode to All Rebels' declaims:

> Culture's leadin' to the extinction o' Man.
> What? Stop the culture?
> That's no' my plan.[31]

However, what both have in common in their communism, at least at the level of their fictional creations, is the spiritual nature of the conversion to a materialist philosophy. Ewan's experience in the gallery is not one of poverty and injustice, but a passionate reaction to the art he sees. The MacDiarmid of 'On a Raised Beach' – like Ewan in the museum – is alone, contemplating the massive shifts in time represented by the stones. History, both artistic and ecological, is more important in each experience than living people. These conversions, like most spiritual awakenings, are highly individualistic: 'Communism is an experience of an extremely intense personal nature.'[32]

'On a Raised Beach' incorporates many of the major ideological strands of the 1930s. For instance, the mystical, millenarian atheism that is better known as communism:

> This is it. The hard fact. The inoppugnable reality,
> Here is something for you to digest.
> Eat this and we'll see what appetite you have left
> For a world hereafter.[33]

Also, the Nietzschean adherence to the power of the will and the self-imposed 'anti-humanity' isolationism of the self-proclaimed *Übermensch* that can be seen as fascistic: 'immense exercise of the will / Inconceivable discipline, courage, and

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[31] Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'Glasgow', Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene: Or The Intelligent Man's Guide To Albyn* (London: Jarrolds, 1934), pp. 118-19; *CP1*, p. 507 ('Ode to All Rebels').
[32] Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1959), p. 217.
[33] *CP1*, p. 430 ('On a Raised Beach').

endurance'.[34] After the creative boom of the roaring twenties, both in terms of MacDiarmid's output in Montrose and modernism in general, we see in the thirties a flagellatory 'Self-purification' and reconsideration of life's metaphysical and economic essentials.[35]

MacDiarmid found himself in Whalsay at the instigation of his friend, Helen Cruickshank. After a decade of hard work in Montrose MacDiarmid was struggling to find an occupation and a home. Through Cruickshank he managed to gain a position in Edinburgh with the Scottish nationalist and Douglasite weekly the *Free Man*, but 'there were too many distractions for MacDiarmid in Edinburgh', principally the bars of Rose Street.[36] One added attraction for MacDiarmid's concerned friends, apart from the accommodation offered by Dr Orr, was that Whalsay was purportedly a dry island. MacDiarmid's drinking habits, always intemperate, had grown to the point of damaging his health and work. If this fairly prosaic explanation is the practical reason MacDiarmid was to make Whalsay his first long-term home since leaving Montrose, then the ideological defence that the poet gives for his shift to Shetland is perhaps more interesting.

Writing in *The Islands of Scotland*, a book that is dedicated to the Scottish nationalist Orr and was published in June 1939 just before the outbreak of World War Two, MacDiarmid reverts to his political Gaelic Idea in order to account for his choice of a new place out of which to create:

> I have always been interested in the great question of North versus South, though the breaking of the old European balance and the titanic emergence of Russia – the East seemed (and still seems) to me to call for an attempt on the part of the Gaelic elements of the West – Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany – to put forward the Gaelic idea as a complement and corrective to the Russian, making an effective quadrilateral of forces; and in the establishment of Saorstat and Eireann and other happenings I hailed

[34] *CP1*, p. 429 ('On a Raised Beach').
[35] Ibid.
[36] Bold, *MacDiarmid*, p. 284.

> what appeared to be the true 'Defence of the West', essential to the conservation of European culture. Whatever the general considerations might be, however, my personal concern was not with Gaelic but with Scots and against southern English.[37]

The emergence of Saorstát Eireann (the Irish Free State) in 1922 from the Irish war of independence (1919-21) – at a time when the British had been fighting an imperial war against the Germans and dealt bloodily with the Irish rebels of the Easter Rising of 1916, such as the Edinburgh-born James Connolly, as traitors – is implicitly heralded by MacDiarmid as being in the greater interests of Western democratic freedom and culture than defeating the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Written in 1939, such a view of international politics finds eerie echo in the communist MacDiarmid's somewhat propitiatory attitude to the threat of Hitler's National Socialism.

However, in 1930 the nationalist MacDiarmid is keener to oppose what he sees as the imperialism of the metropolitan Anglocentric conception of sovereignty:

> If we turn to Europe and see
> Hoo the emergence o' the Russian Idea's
> Broken the balance o' the North and Sooth
> And needs a coonter that can only be
> The Gaelic Idea
> To mak' a parallelogram o' forces,
> Complete the Defence o' the West,
> And end the English betrayal o' Europe.[38]

As discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, MacDiarmid believes 'the English betrayal of Europe' to be their turning away from ancient European civilization for the loot of the British Empire in the nineteenth century and the lure of the American dollar in the present, a path also taken by those the poet sees as false (Anglo) Scots who traded political sovereignty for colonial riches, thus becoming for Burns 'Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation'. MacDiarmid's insistence that the English idea of freedom is

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[37] MacDiarmid, *The Islands of Scotland: Hebrides, Orkneys, and Shetlands* (London: Batsford, 1939), pp. 48-9.
[38] *CP1*, pp. 222-3 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).

imperialistic and materialistic led this communist to believe that German fascist victory in World War Two would almost be preferable to what he conceived of as bourgeois British fascism. His proposition in *The Islands of Scotland* is that what he names as the 'Gaelic elements of the West – Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany' should, by regaining their cultural and political independence, balance and challenge both the metropolitan imperialism of the South (the historical big battalions of Europe, such as England and France) and the communism of the East (Russia, China). This is the root of MacDiarmid's international nationalism or nationalistic communism, the symbiotic core of his politics of place. As Alasdair Gray, who borrows MacDiarmid's notion of Scotland as resembling an island-archipelago in *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland* (1992), explains in *A Short Survey of Classic Scottish Writing* (2001):

> In 1928 it became clear that the British Labour Party had dropped its early policy of independence for Scotland, so he became one of those who founded the Scottish National Party [in fact, the National Party of Scotland]; it expelled him five years later because he thought small independent nations needed international communism to stop them growing parochial. He also thought international communism needed independent nations who preserved their character by resisting Moscow dictatorship, so the British communists expelled him.[39]

MacDiarmid is interested in the geographical extremities of Britain, from Shetland in the north to Cornwall in the south, not simply due to the factually suspect Celtic or Gaelic racial appellation he applies to these places, but because they supply him with inspiration and ammunition in his battle against the might of metropolitanism. This fight is best waged through the regeneration of what is culturally native to a place like Shetland. The importance of the particularity of local culture to the universal is also evident, as we have seen, in the work that issues from his time in

[39] Alasdair Gray, *A Short Survey of Classic Scottish Writing* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p. 135; see Alasdair Gray, *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1992) and the rewritten 1997 edition also published by Canongate.

Montrose. But on the island archipelago of Shetland, MacDiarmid discovers the essentially fragmented nature of all national cultures, isolated in the sea of their own history yet, at the same time, linked to other cultures by the very fluidity of that sea. MacDiarmid understands the similarities – language, religion, education, media such as newspapers – that connect Shetland to the mainland, while still appreciating its distinctive Scandinavian heritage. This experience of the islands allows him a clearer view of Scotland. On seeing Scotland whole, MacDiarmid discovers that there are many Scotlands, each different and difficult of combination:

> Scotland in its history and literature resembles very much a many-roomed house, in the different apartments of which, at one and the same time, entirely different activities are going forward, while the people in any one of these rooms have little or nothing in common with those in the other rooms, so that a time at which, on a given summons, all of them would assemble together is unthinkable. Such a general assembly has never, in fact, taken place in the history of Scotland to date, nor does it ever seem likely to do so [...] Scotland is broken up into islands other than, and to a far greater extent than merely, geographically; and it is perhaps not unreasonable to wish that the process had been physically complete as well, or, at least, to speculate upon the very different course not only Scottish, and English, but world history would have taken if the whole of the mainland of Scotland had been severed from England and broken up into the component islands of a numerous archipelago[40]

Like its islands, Scotland may be perceived to be peripheral to the concerns of metropolitan culture and politics. However, rejecting Auden's assertion from 'Journey to Iceland' (1936) that 'Europe is absent. This is an island and therefore / Unreal', the Gaelic Idea rescues the geopolitical extremities from political and cultural desuetude by positing their potential to spiritually regenerate the materialist insularity of the centres of civilization:

> There is a very generally entertained idea that to live on an island is to be 'out of things' – an assumption that great significance for humanity is more likely to attach itself to big centres of population – to London rather than Eriskay, say. I see no reason for assuming anything of the sort; it is a

[40] MacDiarmid, *The Islands of Scotland: Hebrides, Orkneys, and Shetlands*, pp. 7-8.

> variant of the assumption that the battle must necessarily be to the strong or the race to the swift. [...] No matter how many millions may be congregated into great cities like London and New York, there is nothing inherently impossible or even improbable in Dr Johnson's remark that 'perhaps, in the revolutions of the world, Iona may be some time again the instructress of the Western regions', a statement echoing St. Columba's own prediction in the verse which, being translated, reads: 'Iona of my heart, Iona of my love! Where now is the chanting of the monks, there will be lowing of cattle. But before the world is ended, Iona will be as it was.' The last great revelation came on the island of Patmos; the next – if there is to be one – may just as probably (and indeed, for obvious reasons, far more probably) come on some little island as in London or Leningrad or Berlin or Rome.[41]

Despite the reference to Dr Johnson, *The Islands of Scotland* can be seen as a nativist response to *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), topographically extending yet seeking to ideologically trouble the assured Enlightenment metropolitanism of Boswell and Johnson's tour of lonely places still incompatible with British civilization. Like Nietzsche, MacDiarmid (quoting Count Keyserling) opposes the Darwinian theory that 'life progresses by means of progressive adaptations'.[42] For the Nietzsche of *Human, All Too Human* (1878), 'Degenerate natures are of the highest significance wherever progress is to be affected. Every progress of the whole has to be preceded by a partial weakening. The strongest natures *preserve* the type, the weaker help it to *evolve*.'[43] As with the Nietzschean individual, so for the MacDiarmidian national culture: the truly evolutionary perpetuation of political and cultural particularity, the Defence of the West, can only come through the 'non-adaptation' to the metropolitan norm of that which is different.[44]

MacDiarmid's idea that Shetland should look to its Norse roots in order to facilitate cultural and political regeneration illustrates both his nationalist belief in the value of international difference and a particular desire to see the imperialist reach of

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[41] W.H. Auden, 'Journey to Iceland', *Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 47; MacDiarmid, *The Islands of Scotland*, pp. 20-1.
[42] MacDiarmid, *The Islands of Scotland*, p. 23.
[43] Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; 1878), p. 107.
[44] MacDiarmid, *The Islands of Scotland*, p. 23.

the British State lessened. It was this State whose Ordnance Survey cartographers unable, or politically unwilling, to pronounce many of the place names in Shetland made the changes that rendered MacDiarmid's home of Sudheim, 'pronounced Sudam and meaning simply the southern part of the original farm', Sodom.[45] However, that he should begin this debate in 1939 when Britain was about to begin a war against the fascistic nationalism of Nazism seems like supremely bad timing on MacDiarmid's part. Like D.H. Lawrence and his German wife Frieda in Cornwall during World War One, MacDiarmid believed he was being investigated by the authorities as a spy and that 'he was blackballed by the Bruces' because of these rumours.[46] Brian Smith states that both ideas seem 'equally suspect'.[47] Nonetheless, in police raids of Scottish nationalists on the mainland in 1941, MacDiarmid's typescript 'A Brief Survey of Modern Scottish Politics in the Light of Dialectical Materialism' was seized from the office of the *Scots Socialist* in Glasgow.[48] The marxist MacDiarmid's 'finest hour in Whalsay' may have been helping local cottars to contest rent increases in 1939.[49] As Smith notes, however, it is ironic that MacDiarmid waited so long from initially arriving in Shetland in 1933 to make any impact on the local scene, finally doing so through the radical nationalism of *The Islands of Scotland* in the year World War Two began.[50]

The Islands of Scotland was reviewed by each Shetland newspaper of the day. Both focus on MacDiarmid's nationalism and its application to Shetland. The *Shetland Times*, in an article entitled 'Whither Shetland: Hugh MacDiarmid on the Present and Future', maintains that a 'secessionist movement' which attempts to reverse the 1468-9

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[45] Liv Kjørsvik Schei and Gunnie Moberg, *The Shetland Story* (London: Batsford, 1988), p. 104.
[46] W.R. Aitken, interviewed by Brian Smith, 11 August 1991 in Dunblane (Lerwick, Shetland Archives); see the authoritarian *Kangaroo* (1923) for a fictional recollection of the Lawrence's expulsion from Cornwall in 1917.
[47] Brian Smith, 'Stony Limits: The Grieves in Whalsay, 1933-1942', *MacDiarmid in Shetland*, ed. Laurence Graham and Brian Smith (Lerwick: Shetland Library, 1992), p. 62.
[48] See *NSL*, pp. 191-5.
[49] Smith, 'Stony Limits: The Grieves in Whalsay, 1933-1942', *MacDiarmid in Shetland*, p. 61.
[50] Smith makes this point in his interview with Bill Aitken, 11 August 1991.

mortgaging of Shetland from Scandinavian rule to the Scottish Crown would have no tangible effect on 'economic regeneration':

> If economic prosperity is to come to Shetland, and we all agree as to its necessity, it will have to be deferred indefinitely if it is to depend on a revival of the ancient Norse language, or some secessionist movement 'from Scotland back to Norway'. The author admits that there are no signs in Orkney or Shetland of any such movements. Shetlanders may, and do, as Hugh MacDiarmid states, object to being called Scots, but this is more of a geographical than a historical pride of distinction, and a secessionist movement is so far 'in the offing' at present as to be indiscernible. The hope of a 'Shetland-Faroe-Iceland alliance for the economic advancement of the three Viking colonies' is exceedingly slender.[51]

The *Shetland News* review, 'The Plight of Scotland: Its Islands, Agriculture and Fisheries', is equally sceptical that the cultural retrieval of Shetland's Norse influence would benefit its economy and believes the example of Faroe to be fallacious as it 'was protected by its geographical isolation from many general European influences of the last century'.[52] However, the reviewer gives MacDiarmid credit for a nationalism

> that has nothing exclusive or arrogant about it, like so much nationalism on the Continent to-day, but is at bottom an appreciation of individuality and variety in the scheme of things.[53]

Both the *Shetland Times* (1872) and the *Shetland News* (1885) were established during the late nineteenth-century burgeoning of interest in the Norse past of Shetland, a period in which cultures across Europe sought their roots in a classicism that actually owed more to a Romantic invention of tradition than any rediscovery of real history.[54] The formal organization of Up-Helly-Aa, a pagan festival held in January celebrating the Norse origin of Shetland, also began at this time. MacDiarmid declared it to be 'a really marvellous spectacle' that 'links past and present and reveals the distinctive and

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[51] *Shetland Times*, 1 July 1939, p. 8.
[52] *Shetland News*, 13 July 1939, p. 6.
[53] Ibid.
[54] See John R. Baldwin, ed., *Scandinavian Shetland: An Ongoing Tradition?* (Edinburgh: Scottish Society for Northern Studies, 1978), p. 30.

timeless background against which the generations come and go'.[55] He may have been reminded of the Common Riding of Langholm in his favourable appraisal of this local carnival. The last few decades of the nineteenth century saw great change in Shetland: an appreciable Norse renaissance; the establishment of two local newspapers; the poverty of emigration and eviction, and the prosperity of a thriving fishing trade. However, the economic distress of the 1930s saw Lerwegian socialists question what they saw as the false consciousness of the many working-class participants of Up-Helly-Aa, a festival that they believed sought to mask class differences behind the bluff of a unified racial origin.[56] Similarly, neither Shetland newspaper could be entirely comfortable with the MacDiarmidian diagnosis of Shetland's economic ills being attributable to a refusal to embrace a Norse past when they both owed their existence to a period in which such a cultural resurgence had done nothing to stave off the present economic gloom.

A considered response to the pragmatic and sceptical articles of the Shetland press was lacking in MacDiarmid's reaction to the two newspaper reviews of *The Islands of Scotland.* In a letter to the *Shetland Times* he dismisses as unimaginative 'common-sense' the newspaper's dubiety about the cause of 'Shetland Autonomy based on Scandinavia rather than Britain'.[57] Characteristically, MacDiarmid uses extreme examples of political change in order to illustrate his point that, however unlikely the chances of 'Norn-autonomist renaissances' may be, anything is possible and transformation can only come through radical ideas:

> the vast majority of Russians in 1916 would have regarded the overthrow of the Czarist regime and the establishment of the U.S.S.R. as a dream outside the bounds of all probability, while the hundreds of thousands of German

[55] *Shetland News*, 8 February 1934, p. 4.
[56] See Callum G. Brown, *Up-helly aa: Custom, Culture and Community in Shetland* (Manchester: Mandolin, 1998), p. 162.
[57] MacDiarmid, letter to the *Shetland Times*, 8 July 1939, p. 8.

> Socialists a few years ago would have found the possibility of Hitler's Nazi's coming to power as just as fantastically incredible.[58]

He ends the letter by claiming, somewhat spuriously, that 'The great mass of "common-sense people" have no ground whatever to gibe at the impracticable visions of any poet'.[59] For the absolutist MacDiarmid, any idea, however immoderate or oppressive, is better than no ideas or stasis – a proposition whose validity many suffering 'common-sense people' in a soon to be war-ravaged Europe would perhaps doubt.

Writing in the *Scots Observer* in 1933, MacDiarmid exposes the often authoritarian roots of avant-garde art by equating knowledge of modern scientists with that of totalitarian politicians:

> anyone professing a serious concern with modern poetry is in a position similar to that of a would-be scientist who has not grasped the work of Planck, Bohr, and Einstein, or a political aspirant who has no effective knowledge of Lenin, Mussolini or Hitler.[60]

For MacDiarmid, the correspondence between incompatible scientific or political theories and literary modernism is akin to Rimbaud's revolutionary injunction from hell that 'one must be absolutely modern'.[61] However, in parallel with the adolescence of the symbolist prodigy, MacDiarmid's attitude here can be seen as irresponsible and somewhat immature. According to Brian Smith, MacDiarmid was criticized by communist Bob Cooney – whose analysis the poet termed 'cheap claptrap' and 'the customary anti-intellectualism of his type' – and Peter Jamieson of the Lerwick Unemployed Workers' Movement for what they perceived to be the reactionary and

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[58] MacDiarmid, letter to the *Shetland Times*, 8 July 1939, p. 8.
[59] Ibid.
[60] *RT2*, p. 210 ('The Future of Scottish Poetry').
[61] Arthur Rimbaud, *Collected Poems*, trans. Oliver Bernard (London: Penguin, 1986; 1962), p. 346.

racial ideas of *The Islands of Scotland*, particularly as the book was published in 1939.[62]

Undaunted, MacDiarmid continued to rile Shetlanders through his criticism of their literature. In a letter to the *Shetland News* he claims, 'I do not resent relevant criticism', but on being criticized he adopts his normal elitist tactic of dismissing those who disagree with him by aggressively asserting their lack of the necessary intellectual and cultural equipment to even take part in any debate:

> The question of Shetland literature is not a matter of taste at all, but of simple fact. I feel sure I have read everything that falls into this category, but in case I have overlooked anything of the very slightest value, I challenge your reviewer to mention any Shetland literary work that is not beneath contempt. I insist not only that there is none, but that there is not a single county in Scotland which has not produced a body of writing in prose and verse immensely superior to anything and everything that has ever been produced in the Shetlands, and, even so, of no more than local value and hardly removed from doggerel.[63]

MacDiarmid responded to letters – from, among others, the Shetland poet John Nicolson – accusing him of arrogance and egotism with threats of litigation and by claiming that the 'entirely impersonal' nature of his argument exempted him from receiving personal abuse in return.[64] 'I have no grudge against the Shetlands at all' he stated, insultingly persisting in his incorrect use of the definite article, 'otherwise I would not choose to live here.'[65]

He ran into similar conflict two years later in 1941 over the use of Shetland dialect in literature. MacDiarmid was 'entirely sympathetic to the dialect movement' begun by Walter Robertson, but was not a member of Robertson's Shetland Poetry Circle which encouraged the use of Shetland dialect in literature and the learning of

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[62] MacDiarmid, letter to the *Shetland News*, 3 August 1939, p. 5; see also Brian Smith, 'Stony Limits: The Grieves in Whalsay, 1933-1942', *MacDiarmid in Shetland*, p. 60.
[63] MacDiarmid, letter to the *Shetland News*, 20 July 1939, p. 7.
[64] MacDiarmid, letter to the *Shetland News*, 3 August 1939, p. 5.
[65] Ibid.

Shetland culture and history in schools.[66] Flustered by criticism of his own work, MacDiarmid again responded by deriding the quality of Shetland literature, snootily claiming that his writing on Shetland was 'not likely to be in periodicals which have any circulation in Shetland, nor to be of a nature Shetlanders will appreciate'.[67] This elicited a patriotic response from 'Contemptuous, England': 'Professor Grierson and J. Haldane Burgess, M.A., are both Shetland authors. Can anyone imagine either of them writing a letter such as C.M. Grieve put his name to in your issue of 7th August, 1941?'.[68]

In MacDiarmid's defence, the arguments for and against the use of Shetland dialect that appeared in the *Shetland News* over a yearlong epistolary tussle in 1941 very much resemble the dialect debate in Scotland almost twenty years earlier, something he may have felt he had artistically moved beyond and was tired of disputing. For instance, a correspondent called 'Vong' writes that 'the old Shetland dialect is a thing of the past' and that there is no 'use of reviving or keeping the old dialect when no one understands what it is'.[69] In reply, 'Dalesman' believes that 'Vong' displays 'that "inferiority complex" with which Shetlanders have been inflicted more or less since 1468, when an alien force and culture came north'.[70] The Faroese philologist Jakob Jakobsen perhaps helped to inspire the modern linguistic renaissance that 'Dalesman', Walter Robertson and others promoted, with his two-volume *An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland* (1928-32). The autodidact poet-scholar at Sodom, an advocate of John Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808-9) while in Montrose, may have used Jakobsen's monumental work as he experimented 'with the old Norn words'.[71] MacDiarmid

[66] MacDiarmid, letter to the *Shetland News*, 7 August 1941, p. 2.
[67] Ibid.
[68] *Shetland News*, 11 September 1941, p. 4.
[69] *Shetland News*, 17 April 1941, p. 5.
[70] *Shetland News*, 8 May 1941, p. 5.
[71] *CP1*, p. 427 ('On a Raised Beach').

attempted to stimulate the argument by urging further research to 'uncover additional remains of that lost balladry' of Shetland, such as 'King Orfeo' and 'The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry'.[72] However, having confronted the Orcadian Edwin Muir five years previously over the linguistic, cultural and political direction of Scotland, this must have seemed like an all too familiar battle to MacDiarmid and was one in which, apart from defending his creative reputation, he took almost no part. Ultimately, his concern was with 'The struggle of a nation into consciousness of being' and his own poetry's intimate identification with Scotland: 'Oh, Alba, my son, my son!'.[73]

MacDiarmid uses Shetland as a test case for his nationalism. A place unlike mainland Scotland, Shetland could be conceptually moulded to politically challenge a metropolitanism that subsumes difference and patronizes or ignores what it terms the provinces. Theoretically, this may be one reason that he chose to live in small places, in order to make a virtue out of the provincial and marginal and show that art, like life, happens everywhere:

> I am no further from the 'centre of things'
> In the Shetlands here than in London, New York, or Tokio,
> No further from 'the great warm heart of humanity',
> Or the 'general good', no less 'central to human destiny',
> Sitting alone here enjoying life's greatest good,
> The pleasure of my own company[74]

MacDiarmid's solipsistic ego may also have felt less threatened on the margins. He could harangue Scotland from a distance, play the role of Scotland's anti-popular poet, and yet not directly engage with a professional Scottish intelligentsia based in the cities and universities that this autodidact of generalist knowledge claimed did not even exist. By situating himself in a place where he can believe that his is the most authoritative voice, MacDiarmid's desire to construct a template for difference fails to

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[72] MacDiarmid, letter to the *Shetland News*, 4 September 1941, p. 3.
[73] *CP1*, p. 476 ('Lament for the Great Music').
[74] *CP1*, p. 574 ('In the Shetland Islands').

encounter the stubborn opposition of the diverse accents of city life. Instead, in Shetland and particularly Whalsay, it is MacDiarmid himself who unwittingly represents the metropolitan, finding his individualism at odds with a community proud of its traditions, possessed of what Christopher Harvie describes as a 'toughly independent localism', necessarily at one in their struggle with the elements to earn a living and survive.[75]

On arriving in Whalsay in the summer of 1933 it was remembered that 'Grieves', as the islanders knew him, was 'of a "townie" appearance'.[76] MacDiarmid lived in a community whose acts of practical kindness probably kept his family alive – 'I could not have lived anywhere else that is known to me these last four years without recourse to the poorhouse' – but which was small enough to be acutely aware of their idiosyncrasies, both good and bad: the excitingly emancipated dress and behaviour of Valda, and the rumour that the Grieves kept their son Michael tied in his crib when they went out.[77]

For Anthony Cohen, 'identity in Whalsay is produced by a process of social construction in which the person identified takes a somewhat passive role'.[78] Whether or not such anthropological observation is true of what Eric Linklater describes as 'the redoubtable character' of the people of Whalsay is questionable, but it is certainly not applicable to MacDiarmid.[79] Cohen explains that in Whalsay

> Individuality (in the sense of idiosyncrasy) is recognised and legitimised within strict limits, but is again generally explained by the person's structural connections to the community. Thus the colourfulness of local personalities is celebrated, but the colours fall within a finite spectrum of

[75] Christopher Harvie, *Fool's Gold: The Story of North Sea Oil* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), p. 172.
[76] Whalsay History Group.
[77] *LP*, p. 45; Whalsay History Group.
[78] Anthony P. Cohen, 'A sense of time, a sense of place: the meaning of close social association in Whalsay, Shetland', *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Culture*, ed. Anthony P. Cohen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), p. 38.
[79] Eric Linklater, *Orkney and Shetland: An Historical, Geographical, Social and Scenic Survey* (London: Robert Hale, 1990; 1965), p. 230

> recognisability and permissibility. Beyond this range a person would be dismissed as peculiar, incomprehensible – 'He's always been a bit funny, like.'[80]

Cohen's point could be said to be true of society as a whole, not just small island communities such as Whalsay, but it may partly explain why MacDiarmid remained 'almost entirely aloof from the life of the island', unlike his active communitarianism in Montrose in the 1920s.[81] MacDiarmid knew the value to his poetry of engagement with the community in Montrose, and the perils of too great an isolation on Whalsay in the thirties:

> I do my best work when I have most irons in the fire, and the fact that here I had all my time to myself and had 'nothing to do but write' for a long time made it almost impossible for me to do anything at all.[82]

However, he learned to 'delight in this naethingness', understanding that 'the end / O' a' labour' is 'the Abyss'.[83]

In the 'frenzied and chaotic age' of the devil's decade, MacDiarmid's Shetland-related work comes to accept, even welcome, the 'Spartan impassivity' of life as the Grieves found it on Whalsay.[84] According to Bill Aitken – who visited Whalsay in 1937 and provided MacDiarmid with books (such as Auden and MacNeice's *Letters from Iceland* and *Men Without Art* by Wyndham Lewis) and cuttings from newspapers – 'he was very conscious of the fact that Shetland was remote' and so 'relished the contact with someone from the outside world'.[85] Perhaps also conscious of his difference from the islanders MacDiarmid would retort that

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[80] Cohen, 'A sense of time, a sense of place: the meaning of close social association in Whalsay, Shetland', *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Culture*, p. 24.
[81] MacDiarmid, letter to the *Shetland News*, 25 September 1941, p. 4.
[82] *LP*, p. 45.
[83] *CP1*, pp. 440, 441 ('Shetland Lyrics: De Profundis').
[84] *CP1*, p. 429 ('On a Raised Beach').
[85] W.R. Aitken, interviewed by Brian Smith, 11 August, 1991 in Dunblane, (Lerwick: Shetland Archives).

> To be exclusively concerned with the highest forms of life
> Is not to be less alive than 'normal' people.[86]

This confirms his elitist aphorism of 'On a Raised Beach': 'Great work cannot be combined with surrender to the crowd'.[87]

His 'Shetland Lyrics' find solitary revelation in the proximity of the boundless sea from which the Shetlanders earn a living as herring fishers:

> For this is the way that God sees life,
> The haill jing-bang o's appearin'
> Up owre frae the edge o' naethingness
> – It's his happy cries I'm hearin'.[88]

MacDiarmid claimed to 'like these Shetland fisherman – at least when they are on the job'.[89] However, what 'appealed to me' was the practical realities of their 'coarser lives', an authenticity that cuts them off from perception of the divinity of a natural Creation that they are closer to than is the self-conscious, alienated intellectual:

> Aye, and I kent their animal forms
> And primitive minds, like fish frae the sea,
> Cam' faur mair naturally oot o' the bland
> Omnipotence o' God than a fribble like me.[90]

The stark beauty of Shetland and its illimitable ocean vistas lead the poet to think that 'There's a structure nae doot', but he resists the temptation of imposing a religious design on this 'Heavenly facsimile', preferring to follow the flickering of his own inspiration:

> *Glory on the water and grace in the welkin*
> *But how sall I follow this flicker away,*
> *Why follow, how fail, this fey flicker there,*
> *This faint flicker where,*

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[86] *CP1*, p. 575 ('In the Shetland Islands')
[87] *CP1*, p. 429 ('On a Raised Beach').
[88] *CP1*, p. 438 ('Shetland Lyrics: With the Herring Fishers').
[89] *LP*, p. 52.
[90] *CP1*, p. 438 ('Shetland Lyrics: Deep-Sea Fishing').

Wi' my wingbeats biddin' good-bye to the gulls,
To the sea, and the sun, and a' the laigh?[91]

Writing from the 'uninhabited isle' of Bruse Holm, MacDiarmid contends that 'Nae man, nae spiritual force, can live / In Scotland lang'.[92] He adjures Robin McKelvie Black, editor of the nationalist-Douglasite *Free Man*, to 'leave it tae' and 'Mak' a warld o' your ain like me'.[93] MacDiarmid evacuates Shetland of contemporary substance – his insistence that it has no literary culture, for instance, and should return to its Norse roots – in order to find a mystical solitude through which to berate Scotland for its perceived spiritual emptiness:

There is nae ither country 'neath the sun
That's betrayed the human spirit as Scotland's done.[94]

In deathly isolation – 'Scotland nae mair exists for me / Than it does for ony ordinary suicide' – the poet assumes an 'angelic state' through which he can truly envision the universal:

So those who have had to dwell
In solitude, at furthest remove from their fellows,
Serve the community too. Their loneliness
Is only because they belong to a wider community
Than that of their immediate environment,
Not to one country or race, but to humanity[95]

MacDiarmid serves the community in Shetland by withdrawing from it and universalizing his mission through a spiritual communism that is not solely concerned with 'one country or race' because 'history is climbing to world unity'.[96] Claiming to 'have found in Marxism all that I need' his solitude, however, displays the alienation

[91] *CP1*, pp. 442, 441, 443 ('Shetland Lyrics: Mirror Fugue').
[92] *CP2*, pp. 1272, 1273 ('Letter to R.M.B.').
[93] *CP2*, p. 1273.
[94] Ibid.
[95] *CP2*, pp. 1271-2 ('Letter to R.M.B.'); *CP1*, p. 498 ('Ode to All Rebels'); p. 476-7 ('Lament for the Great Music').
[96] *CP1*, p. 410 ('Etika Preobrazhennavo Erosa').

that the ideology purports to end.[97] His 'supreme reality', being 'visible to the mind alone', is 'as lonely and unfrequented' as the great music of the pibrochs.[98] Torn from the spiritual purity of his mystical Celtic communism, the grim reality of the outside world drew MacDiarmid off the island in 1942 and into war work in Glasgow. He was never to return to Shetland.

The historical reality of MacDiarmid's East-West synthesis at the heart of the Gaelic Idea was the German-Soviet pact made by Hitler and Stalin on 23 August 1939. According to Brian Smith in his essay on the poet's time in Shetland, 'Stony Limits: The Grieves in Whalsay, 1933-1942', MacDiarmid followed the Communist Party line in regarding 'the British and French bourgeoisie as a "far greater enemy" than the Germans, but it is unlikely that he would have broadcast that analysis in Whalsay', even if he was content to do so in a letter to fellow communist Sorley MacLean:

> I note what you say about the War but do not agree although the Germans are appalling enough and in a short-time view more murderously destructive, they cannot win – but the French and British bourgeoisie can, and is a far greater enemy. If the Germans win they could not hold their gain for long – but if the French and British bourgeoisie win it will be infinitely more difficult to get rid of them later.[99]

At this historical moment MacDiarmid was not, in fact, a member of the CPGB, having been expelled on 23 February 1939.[100] However, still a communist in principle, MacDiarmid wants the bourgeois liberal political order swept away and to this end even German fascism seems preferable.

As Jonathan Glover relates, this was also the Moscow-orchestrated response of many CPGB members in the thirties, whose unquestioning support for what they imagined to be international socialism lead to the skewered belief that 'democracy and

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[97] *CP1*, p. 615 ('Further Passages from "The Kind of Poetry I Want"').
[98] *CP1*, p. 475 ('Lament for the Great Music').
[99] Brian Smith, 'Stony Limits: The Grieves in Whalsay, 1933-1942', *MacDiarmid in Shetland*, p. 62; *L*, p. 611 (to Sorley MacLean, 5 June 1940).
[100] See John Manson, 'The Poet and the Party', *Cencrastus*, 68, pp. 35-8 for the chronology of MacDiarmid's membership of the CPGB in the thirties.

fascism were not importantly different' and that 'the British Empire was as bad as Nazi Germany'.[101] Such deluded communist inflexibility is reflected in MacDiarmid's controversially Anglophobic, anti-metropolitan 'On the Imminent Destruction of London, June 1940', written in the anti-bourgeois mode of many thirties poems, such as Betjeman's 'Slough' (1937), but lacking the benignity of that poem's 'friendly bombs'.[102] The point is also confirmed by MacDiarmid's secretary in Whalsay, Henry Grant Taylor, who thought that 'when the blitzkrieg started' the poet was 'rather delighted', believing 'that the old order was being smashed up'.[103] However, MacDiarmid's main private worry during the years of the Second World War, the acute paper shortage which disabled publishers from issuing his poetry – demonstrated by his somewhat solipsistic statement that 'The fall of France put an end to the Obelisk Press's proposal to issue my enormous poem [*Mature Art*]' – illustrates his real concern: culture.[104]

MacDiarmid's concept of the Defence of the West is his ideational cognizance that a civilizational crisis was looming on the horizon in the thirties. Europe was to be stretched to breaking-point, suffering its second great cataclysm in the space of only two decades. As Auden's 'low dishonest decade' rumbled towards its ominous apotheosis on 'September 1, 1939' the independence of small nations, democracy and European culture were in dire need of defence.[105] MacDiarmid was not alone among the modernists and poets of the thirties in his understanding that impending civilizational crisis during the devil's decade was a threat to the West, not just as a

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[101] Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001; 1999), p. 270.
[102] See MacDiarmid, *The Revolutionary Art of the Future: Rediscovered Poems*, ed. John Manson, Dorian Grieve and Alan Riach (Manchester, Carcanet, 2003), pp. 42-3; John Betjeman, 'Slough', *Poetry of the Thirties*, ed. Robin Skelton (London: Penguin, 2000; 1964), pp. 74-5.
[103] Henry Grant Taylor, interviewed by Brian Smith, 16 August 1991 in Galashiels, (Lerwick, Shetland Archives).
[104] *L*, p. 175 (to William Soutar, 16 November 1940).
[105] W.H. Auden, 'September 1, 1939', *Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 86.

space on the map, but as an idea: of an ancient culture and as a world political leader, the capital letter being symbolic of the imperialistically emblematic status of the West as a defender of freedom.

Auden, described by Robin Skelton as 'the clear Master of the Period', began the decade confidently imagining 'New styles of architecture, a change of heart', but extinguished his thirties utopianism by resignedly admitting in 1939 that 'poetry makes nothing happen'.[106] After Yeats, Ireland may have 'her madness and her weather still'; however the nation also has political independence and renewed cultural vigour, both partly shaped by his nationalist politics of place.[107] As we shall see in Chapter Five of this thesis, MacDiarmid adhered throughout the thirties and beyond to an evolutionary communism that believed 'Poetry like politics maun cut / The cackle and pursue real ends', following Lenin's credo that communism is the apotheosis of Western civilization, not its negation.[108] MacDiarmid's Defence of the West is an apologia of national cultural and political difference that 'Implies a changing conception of culture' leading to 'A multiplication of regionalisms'.[109] Being communistically in line 'with the New writers' of the thirties, this form of cultural

> *Partikularismus*, however,
> Is hostile to nationalism
> And friendly to internationalism.[110]

For José Ortega y Gasset in his *La Rebelión de las Masas*, first published in Spain in 1930 and translated into English and published in 1932, 'every present-day European knows, with a certainty much more forcible than that of all his expressed

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[106] Robin Skelton, ed., 'Introduction', *Poetry of the Thirties*, p. 33; W.H. Auden, 'Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all'; 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1986; 1977), pp. 36; 242.
[107] Auden, 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', *The English Auden*, p. 242.
[108] *CP1*, p. 324 ('Second Hymn to Lenin').
[109] *CP1*, p. 653 ('I Am with the New Writers').
[110] Ibid.

"ideas" and "opinions", that the European of to-day *must* be a liberal'.[111] The thesis of *The Revolt of the Masses* is that since communism and fascism do not have a genuine foothold in European liberal tradition they are anachronisms. With no grip of the historical liberal framework in which these twin mass-movements vie for political and cultural supremacy they doom themselves, or the Europe they contend for, to ruin:

> Both Bolshevism and Fascism are two false dawns; they do not bring the morning of a new day, but of some archaic day, spent over and over again: they are mere primitivism. [...] No doubt an advance must be made on the liberalism of the XIXth Century. But this is precisely what cannot be done by any movement such as Fascism, which declares itself anti-liberal. Because it was that fact – the being anti-liberal or non-liberal – which constituted man previous to liberalism. And as the latter triumphed over its opposite, it will either repeat its victory time and again, or else everything – liberalism and anti-liberalism – will be annihilated in the destruction of Europe.[112]

On the publication of Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses* in Britain in 1932 MacDiarmid, writing an article for the *Free Man* entitled 'Gasset versus Gas', uses the Spaniard's book to lambast newspapers, such as the *Record* and the *Evening News*, for their anti-Irish bias. For MacDiarmid, such bigotry is the bitter fruit of those of mass-mediocrity Gasset calls barbarian, and a sign of national degeneration that must be opposed:

> The whole *Record* campaign with its insistence on monarchy, continued English over-control, support of the existing economic and imperial systems, etc., is a conspiracy unworthily masking itself behind a pretended interest in Scotland, to delude those great majority bodies of the Scottish electorate who are Socialist and Irish. How long will it take these to realise the callous stick-at-nothing Conservatism of the whole manoeuvre? Surely Scottish Socialists have seen through [Ramsay] MacDonald. Surely the Irish in Scotland are not going to take the *Record*'s and *Evening News*'s anti-Irish policy – or the *Scots Observer*'s call for the repatriation of the Scottish Irish – lying down? The hope of Scotland lies in a concentration of these elements on the side of Nationalism opposed to the 'moderate' elements now trying to capture the Scottish Movement.[113]

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[111] José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932), p. 113
[112] Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, p. 103.
[113] *RT2*, p. 409 ('Gasset versus Gas').

As always in his attitude to sectarianism in Scotland MacDiarmid is admirably clear and consistent in his repugnance of a bigotry that still stains the nation, in particular the central belt, and in his use of Gasset to bash the bigots MacDiarmid brings us back to his Defence of the West.

The radical nationalist MacDiarmid rails against moderation in the Scottish Movement but despite his totalitarian communism he believes 'the true "Defence of the West"' is the safeguarding of national difference.[114] MacDiarmid condemns England as the betrayer of Europe because he sees the metropolitan English ethos as being an imperialistically nationalist one, in opposition to his own internationalist Scottish Republicanism. He needs communism to save him from the charge that, as a nationalist, his political stance is as narrow and parochial as that of the anti-Irish-Catholic sectarians and their monarchical English masters' deformation of the Scottish polity. MacDiarmid opposes imperialism because it is a denial of the very difference that is a central tenet of the Defence of the West. If the English ethos is to rule Europe and the world then the individual contribution that each independent national culture has to make to civilization will be lost under the insular metropolitanism that the English espouse. The Defence of the West is 'an effective quadrilateral of forces', a precarious political balance between the nations of North and South, East and West that is MacDiarmid's defence of cultural difference:

> The effort of culture is towards greater differentiation
> Of perceptions and desires and values and ends[115]

It is up to each nation to find its own unique cultural and political voice, unhindered by the imperialism of a larger force, and add this to the comity of nations. George Davie sees MacDiarmid as positing an 'historic rivalry between the national groups', an

[114] MacDiarmid, *The Island of Scotland*, p. 49.
[115] Ibid.; *CP2*, p. 1138 ('England's Double Knavery').

antinomian 'international struggle between groups as to the quality of their respective contributions to culture'.[116] What Gasset names as liberalism the communist MacDiarmid, writing from the marginality of Whalsay, would recognize as the cultural and political difference central to the radical evolution of Western civilzation, and it is this that he wishes to defend.

MacDiarmid's response to the fascist threat of the thirties, in common with many others, was a hardening of his communism. This is particularly noticeable from the middle of the decade onwards. MacDiarmid's biographer tells us that for the poet 'The year 1936', the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, 'was to be a grim one, full of anger and indignation'.[117] On a personal front, he had more difficulties over his divorce from his first wife.[118] In terms of work, he was stymied by Routledge's refusal to publish the radical 'Red Scotland'. A combination of problems arose with the publication of Edwin Muir's *Scott and Scotland*, which MacDiarmid took to be a personal betrayal of the nationalist goals of the Scottish Renaissance movement.

For Martin Green, '1936 was the crucial year of the decade', symbolizing all that the thirties seemed to ideologically represent.[119] Similarly, for Frederick R. Benson, the Spanish conflict 'represented the intellectual as well as the emotional climax of the turbulent 1930s', and was important to the intellectuals of the Left because it 'provided the first violent test, at least for most European and American radicals, of the usefulness of Marxism as a means of ordering experience'.[120] According to Neal Wood, 'Spain was the first and last crusade of the British left-wing intellectual. Never again was such enthusiasm mobilized, nor did there exist such a firm conviction in the

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[116] George Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect: The Problem of Generalism and Specialisation in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), p. 111.
[117] Bold, *MacDiarmid*, p. 338.
[118] See *NSL*, pp. 115-18, 127-8.
[119] Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: A Narrative of 'Decadence' in England after 1918* (London: Constable, 1977), p. 307.
[120] Frederick R. Benson, *Writers in Arms: The Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War* (London: University of London Press, 1968), pp. 3, 19.

rightness of a cause.'[121] The importance of MacDiarmid's Defence of the West is intimated by Hugh D. Ford's statement that 'Many in England believed that the future of Europe would be decided in Spain'.[122]

MacDiarmid's Spanish poem, *The Battle Continues*, was not published until 1957, which he put down to 'political reasons'.[123] However, its international anti-fascist politics are characteristic of MacDiarmid's work from Whalsay in the thirties and he began writing the poem while he was on the island.[124] The poem is a sustained attack on the poet Roy Campbell, a South African of Scottish descent. A convert to Catholicism who failed his entrance examinations for Oxford, Campbell wrote eleven poems dealing with the war in Spain, including *Flowering Rifle* (1939), and falsely claimed to have seen action during the war.[125] That Campbell was a fascist *and* a Scot – for MacDiarmid, almost anyone notable of Scottish descent, or with a Scottish-sounding surname, was a Scot – was particularly calculated to raise MacDiarmid's ire, as if a right-wing Scot constitutes a false ideological calculation:

> Scotland, thank God, gave scores of her sons
> To the Republican cause in Spain,
> Sent out her doctors and nurses,
> Ambulances and foodships.
> Ninety per cent of the Scottish people
> Were whole-heartedly for the Republican cause,
> – Hating like Hell all you have fought for and praised.
> Are all these people wrong, Campbell,
> Are only you right?
> You were always a braggart, Campbell,
> But in the eyes of Scotland you rank
> With Judas and Sir John Menteith
> And the executioners of WilliamWallace
> And the judge who sentenced John Maclean.[126]

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[121] Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, p. 57.
[122] Hugh D. Ford, *A Poet's War: British Poets and the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 20.
[123] *L*, p. 413 (to Albert Mackie, 3 January 1941).
[124] See *NSL*, p. 161.
[125] See Ford, *A Poet's War*, p. 180.
[126] *CP2*, p. 943 (*The Battle Continues*).

Campbell is a false Scot, a betrayer of the true Scottish political spirit that for MacDiarmid is radically nationalist and anti-monarchical. He makes a further generalization that 'no creative artist has ever belonged / Or ever can belong to the Right', a fallacious assumption that many politically correct contemporary academics also hold.[127] For MacDiarmid, 'Poetry is a progressive art'; as such, the fascist Campbell has 'done literature dirt' and 'swindled the Muse'.[128]

Comparing fascism to 'a foul disease' in the body politic, MacDiarmid says

> That Mankind should perish in such a plague
> Would make lunacy of the whole creation.[129]

However, the revolutionary violence of Stalinism which MacDiarmid approves – 'Stalin, when we Scottish Gaels salute you' – killed, at the lowest estimate, twenty million.[130] George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) emphasizes the aggressively counter-revolutionary nature of the Communist Party in Spain, a recognition that led to the dying author's writing of the anti-totalitarian *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) on the Scottish island of Jura.[131] However, MacDiarmid's absolutist evolutionary communism insists on a creative potential that not everyone has:

> All the bourgeoisie are alike in this,
> Running the whole gamut of life from A to B,
> University professors, lecturers, school-teachers,
> Ministers, and all that awful gang of mammalia,
> The high mucky-mucks.
> They have all the same pettifogging spirit,
> So narrow it shows little but its limits,
> The same incapacity for culture and creative work[132]

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[127] *CP2*, p. 921 (*The Battle Continues*).
[128] *CP2*, pp. 921, 920.
[129] *CP2*, p. 953.
[130] *CP2*, p. 1323 ('Lamb Dearg Aboo'); see Martin Amis, *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002) for a metropolitan's personalistic account of communism.
[131] See Orwell's Appendices for his explanation as to why the CP in Spain acted 'as an anti-revolutionary force', *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Penguin, in association with Secker & Warburg, 2000; 1938), p. 199.
[132] *CP2*, p. 954 (*The Battle Continues*).

The revolutionary attempt to change the 'Pusillanimous and frigid time-servers' of the bourgeoisie into supposedly radically creative communist individuals required an engineering of souls and murdering of bodies incompatible with an evolutionary solution.[133] 'First Hymn to Lenin' is brutally suggestive of this:

> As necessary, and insignificant, as death
> Wi' a' its agonies in the cosmos still
> The Cheka's horrors are in their degree;
> And'll end suner! What maitters't wha we kill
> To lessen that foulest murder that deprives
> Maist men o' real lives?[134]

The extremism of MacDiarmid's poem finds sombre echo in Auden's 'conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder'.[135] As Hamish Henderson says, it can be noted with deadly irony that the dedicatee of 'First Hymn to Lenin' (1931) was killed in one of Stalin's death-camps. Prince D.S. Mirsky (1890-1939) joined the CPGB in 1931 and returned to the Soviet Union in the following year. 'Of all the countless victims of Stalin', claims Henderson, Mirsky 'has a tragic place all to himself':

> In 1937 he was arrested when the Writers' Union was 'purged', and given a summary sentence by NKVD troika; the rest of his life was spent in the camps of the Gulag. According to eye-witnesses, he succumbed to extreme anguish and despair, and is said to have died insane in a camp near Vladivostock in January 1939.[136]

Mirsky and Stalin: both reside in the pantheon of MacDiarmid's heroes, providing irreconcilable witness to an anarchistic quality in his politics: 'Communism is a stage on the way to Anarchism – a necessary and indispensable stage; the only entrance to the promised land'.[137] This rogue element in the poet's political thinking always gave glimpses of being present, but in the bleak yet inspiring surroundings of

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[133] *CP2*, p. 954 (*The Battle Continues*).
[134] *CP1*, p. 298 ('First Hymn to Lenin').
[135] Auden, 'Spain', *Selected Poems*, p. 54.
[136] Hamish Henderson, *The Armstrong Nose: Selected Letters of Hamish Henderson*, ed. Alec Finlay (Edinburgh: Polygon 1996), p. 293.
[137] *LP*, p. 67.

Whalsay, separated from a place like that of Montrose where he was in productive touch with a community, the rebel finally spins off the edge of the world:

> Victim o' nae dialectic system, o' nae
> Intricate web o' human beliefs to gainsay
> Ocht that but for it I'd naturally think, feel, or dae,
> Lookin' back on a' that – a' that ither men
> Are and dae and think – I feel just as when
> A clean man amang ither men first comes to ken
> Some o' them ha'e venereal disease,
> Vague, terrible phenomenon o' a warld no' his ain;
> And the diseased men's callousness sees....[138]

The extremism of MacDiarmid's communism in the thirties appears to problematize his nationalist Defence of the West. However, finding anti-fascist inspiration in the Republicans of the Spanish Civil War, MacDiarmid in Whalsay continues the task he set for himself in Montrose: the ideological construction of a new internationalist Scotland. He moves from the culturist Scottish Renaissance of twenties metaphysical Montrose, with the 'lost Scotland' of Dunbar as his exemplar, to a sharper political ethos of John Maclean-inspired Scottish Republicanism. With this pronouncedly radical voice MacDiarmid somewhat unfairly decries former ally James Whyte (dedicatee of 'On a Raised Beach') and *The Modern Scot* as being fascistic and belonging to the 'St Andrews school of polite literature': '*Our line represents a complete break with recent Scottish cultural developments, and the realisation that further such developments must of necessity be revolutionary.*'[139] Still refusing to detach Scottish nationalism from international communism, the symbiotic core of his politics of place, in Scottish Republicanism MacDiarmid finds a tradition that he can embrace and believe himself to be the inheritor of, a place where his politics and poetry can find a genealogically radical home.

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[138] *CP1*, p. 504 ('Ode to All Rebels').
[139] *CP2*, p. 1265 ('Homage to Dunbar'); *RT3*, pp. 10, 11 ('The Red Scotland Thesis: Forward to the John Maclean Line').

'The Red Scotland Thesis: Forward to the John Maclean Line', extracts of which were published in the *Voice of Scotland* – 'a new quarterly devoted to Scottish Literature and Politics (i.e. Scottish Republicanism à la John Maclean)' which ran from 1938, when this article appeared, to 1958 – is perhaps the culmination of MacDiarmid's politics and his response to the capitalist crisis of the thirties:

> Having regard to the future of Civilisation and the intensifying War and Fascism [*sic*] menace of this phase of the imminent collapse of Capitalist Society, and being passionately anxious to 'pull our full weight' (as Scotland has hitherto failed to do in the work of world-revolution) in our native country where these issues come closest to us in an immediate practical sense, we are convinced that, just as [James] Connolly said that in Ireland the social revolution would be incomplete without a national revolution too, so in Scotland here it is clear that the objectives of the social revolution can only be fully realised if it is accompanied by autonomy on a Communist basis.[140]

Thrown back on his own intellectual resources in the isolation of Whalsay, MacDiarmid's autodidactic generalism 'finds' Maclean, a figure epitomizing the real Red Scotland who has been buried by the nation's Anglocentric historiography and the specialized educational system of capitalism. Maclean's attraction for MacDiarmid is the definitive fusing in a radical Scottish Republicanism of Scottish political autonomy with an international socialist revolution. In the process of addressing the neglect of Scotland's social and political problems, a radical Scottish Republicanism opposes English imperial ascendancy, within the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. The implication of English imperialism for socialists is that the English workers are no freer than their Scottish comrades. The smashing of English imperialism is the first step on the road to socialist revolution in Scotland.

The threat of another war may have furthered MacDiarmid's resolve in his Scottish Republicanism. He quotes from Maclean's 1923 Gorbals Election Address in

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[140] *NSL*, p. 152 (to Sorley MacLean, 28 March 1938); *RT3*, p. 9 ('The Red Scotland Thesis: Forward to the John Maclean Line').

which Maclean states that 'Scotland's wisest policy is to declare for a Republic in Scotland, so that the youths of Scotland will not be forced out to die for England's markets'.[141] On refusing to be drafted for a National Service medical in 1952 the poet's son, Michael Grieve, was sent to Saughton Prison for six months. Both father and son, like many other nationalists and Maclean, believed the conscription of Scottish youths in wars involving the United Kingdom to be against the terms of the treaty of Union of 1707. It was also the understanding of MacDiarmid and Maclean that imperialism was a cause of war and that a world of Workers' States would be a peaceful one. MacDiarmid's anti-imperialism is cultural as well as political. He claims that cultural nationalism must be in the interests of the workers otherwise it is not part of the revolutionary movement.

MacDiarmid's Workers' Republicanism marks the end-point of his influence in the Scottish Renaissance movement. However, the radical Left to which he is now aligned must recognize their responsibilities to the cause of Scottish autonomy:

> The Communist and Social democratic neglect of and side-tracking of the Scottish Cause up to now has been responsible for the long confused and inefficient Scottish Nationalist grouping, and the extent to which the whole thing has now played into Fascist hands.[142]

That Scottish nationalism had fallen 'into Fascist hands' is a reference to the Duke of Montrose and his right-wing Scottish Party, which merged with the National Party of Scotland – which MacDiarmid had helped to found in 1928 – in April 1934. MacDiarmid believed the Duke of Montrose to have been 'the commander of the gunboat that shelled [James] Connolly and his men. A pretty Nationalist indeed!'.[143]

The communistic element of MacDiarmid's Scottish Republicanism is provoked by anti-fascist response to the Spanish Civil War but is also radical acknowledgement

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[141] *RT3*, p. 9 ('The Red Scotland Thesis: Forward to the John Maclean Line').
[142] *RT3*, p. 11.
[143] *RT3*, p. 10.

of the Great Depression of the thirties, what G.D.H. Cole terms 'a crisis of the capitalist world'.[144] However, MacDiarmid's belief in the possibility of a Red Scotland rests on the somewhat wish-fulfilling notion of 'the persistent termendous [*sic*] Radicalism (leading more than once to all-over Socialist majorities) of the Scottish electorate *vis-à-vis* the English'.[145] If Scotland's evolutionary destiny as MacDiarmid envisioned it in Montrose in the twenties was metaphysical, then in Whalsay in the thirties it is revolutionary. Scotland's role in the Defence of the West, so far 'stultified by the English connection', is to oppose the English ethos of imperialistic nationalism through an internationalist Scottish Republicanism.[146] An element of essentialism still clings to the idea of a metaphysical national destiny, and MacDiarmid's hero-worshipping of Maclean as national saviour is similar to the Christ-like Burns of *A Drunk Man*:

> As Pilate and the Roman soldiers to Christ
> Were Law and Order to the finest Scot of his day,
> One of the few true men in our sordid breed,
> A flash of sun in a country all prison-grey.
> Speak to others of Christian charity; I cry again
> For vengeance on the murderers of John Maclean.[147]

What is eccentrically impressive about MacDiarmid's lionizing of Maclean is that concern with the potential international ramifications of his Scottish Republicanism comes from a poet situated so far from the radical incendiarism of urban industrial Glasgow.

MacDiarmid describes Shetland as 'the end of the old world; and the beginning of the new!'.[148] Ostensibly, he means that the actions of Shetlanders are 'the nearest thing to real Christianity I ever encountered', implying a belief-system not overly

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[144] G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought, Volume V: Socialism and Fascism 1931-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1960), p. 11.
[145] *RT3*, p. 10 ('The Red Scotland Thesis: Forward to the John Maclean Line').
[146] Ibid.
[147] *CP1*, p. 486 ('John Maclean (1879-1923)').
[148] *RT2*, p. 512 ('The Shetland Islands').

infected by bourgeois values of appearance.[149] On a deeper level, however, Shetland represented a new beginning for MacDiarmid. Personally, a first marriage having foundered in the confines of provincial Montrose, his second, to Valda, was more successfully tested in the harsh conditions of Whalsay. Ideologically, the cultural nationalism of the Scottish Renaissance is superseded by an incisively political radical Scottish Republicanism which, as the next chapter illustrates, constitutes a hidden tradition unearthed through MacDiarmid's autodidactic generalism, a 'mental pabulum' he would have needed more than ever in the relative intellectual isolation of Whalsay.[150] As the economic boom of the twenties gives way to the depression of the thirties, we see an evolution from the dualism characteristic of MacDiarmid's thinking on the waste land of Scottish culture (examined in Chapter One of this thesis), to adventures in the dialectic through which to oppose the irrationalist alienation of capital (explored in Chapter Five). In *Illusion and Reality* – a copy of which the marxist MacDiarmid wrote that he was 'anxious to get' in a 1938 letter from Whalsay to Bill Aitken – published posthumously in the year of his death fighting Franco in 1937, Christopher Caudwell claims that 'In a revolutionary period culture expresses the aspirations of the revolution or the doubts of the dispossessed'.[151] MacDiarmid's poetry, from his exilic home on Whalsay, expresses both revolutionary ardour and the loneliness of loss.

Many of the poems that MacDiarmid wrote while in Whalsay push beyond the materialist borders of theoretical communism as espoused by thirties metropolitan intellectuals towards a mystical Celtic communism. MacDiarmid claims that he chose to live in Shetland because he was 'intent upon the connection between solitude and

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[149] *RT2*, p. 512 ('The Shetland Islands').
[150] 'But reading had to be found somewhere – he called it mental pabulum', Henry Grant Taylor, interviewed by Brian Smith, 16 August 1991 in Galashiels (Lerwick, Shetland Archives).
[151] *NSL*, p. 151 (to W.R. Aitken, 28 January 1938); Christopher Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1973; 1937), p. 57.

universality'.[152] Without the practical involvement in the life of a locality such as he had in Montrose, MacDiarmid is forced to imagine a community. For company, he invites spiritual, poetic and political mentors to his island, ghostly presences in memoriam. First we meet Liam Mac'Ille Iosa, pseudonym of William Gillies (1865-1932). Born in Galloway, but brought up in London where his father was a merchant banker, Gillies was co-leader of the militant Scots National League (founded in 1920) with Erskine of Marr. A Celtic communist and Scots Sinn Feiner, providing a safe house for wanted Irish Republicans, he was a friend with Scottish Republicans John Murdoch and John Maclean:

> *Ad te Domine appello*; so even as Pascal against Rome
> No matter what other men think, desire, and feel
> For Scotland to-day we irreconcilables carry our appeal
> Completely over their heads and straight to God home.[153]

Rilke follows, long a favourite of MacDiarmid as typifying the perfect poet of integrative artistic and metaphysical vision:

> When but the last films of flesh fell,
> When we were in the world and yet not in it,
> And the spirit seemed to waver its eyas wings
> Into the divine obscurity, it could not win it.[154]

Finally the unheralded Doughty, epical poet of ancient Celtic Britain yet, as MacDiarmid believed in 1936, 'the only English poet who belongs to the new order, that is to say, to our time':

> I have seen Silence lift his head
> And Song, like his double, lift yours,
> And know, while nearly all that seems living is dead,
> You were always consubstantial with all that endures.[155]

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[152] MacDiarmid, *The Islands of Scotland*, p. 6.
[153] *CP1*, p. 416 ('In Memoriam: Liam Mac'Ille Iosa').
[154] See Tom Hubbard, *The Integrative Vision: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Baudelaire, Rilke and MacDiarmid* (Kirkcaldy: Akros, 1997); *CP1*, p. 417-18 ('Vestgia Nulla Retrorsum').
[155] *SP*, p. 126 ('Charles Doughty and the Need for Heroic Poetry'); *CP1*, p. 422 ('Stony Limits').

As MacDiarmid the mystical marxist sings in 'On a Raised Beach', 'I am enamoured of the desert at last', one is reminded of his genuine engagement in the Montrose community, a localism that entailed practical day-to-day involvement through his work as a journalist and socialist councillor.[156] Close to the end of his time on Whalsay, MacDiarmid wrote to Albert Mackie that he found 'the interstices of an overworked journalist's time my most productive, and up here I frequently wish I had not all my time to myself, but a job to tie me down and concentrate my powers'.[157] But on Whalsay, shaken by the breakdown of both his first marriage and his health, MacDiarmid retreats in order the better to rediscover his self and his political mission:

> I was better with the sounds of the sea
> Than with the voices of men
> And in desolate and desert places
> I found myself again.
> For the whole of the world came from these
> And he who returns to the source
> May gauge the worth of the outcome
> And approve and perhaps reinforce
> Or disapprove and perhaps change its course.[158]

Alan Riach says of the poet on Whalsay, 'In the 1930s, MacDiarmid does what Pound fails to do, what Eliot (let alone Auden) could never have done and what Brecht also does, but bleakly, in *The Measures Taken*: he counts the cost.'[159] MacDiarmid asks, '*When was anything born in Scotland last, / Risks taken and triumphs won?*', but what is the cost if he has risked everything to find himself?[160] MacDiarmid claims in a recriminatory letter to Peggy from Whalsay that 'Our rupture has not only cost me dear – but Scotland dear, for it destroyed the pith of my poetry and the very core and kernel

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[156] *CP1*, p. 431 ('On a Raised Beach').
[157] *L*, p. 412 (to Albert Mackie, 3 January 1941).
[158] *CP1*, p. 454 ('From "The War with England"'); Shetlander Carolyn Robertson writes that 'Shetland is given a place in MacDiarmid's concept of Scotland, but only as a dead place filled with primitive people to which an intellectual could retreat to come to terms with his own psyche', 'The Life and Work of Hugh MacDiarmid in Whalsay, Shetland' (unpublished master's thesis, University of St Andrews, 2001), pp. 56-7.
[159] Alan Riach, 'Reading Hugh MacDiarmid', *Hugh MacDiarmid: Selected Poetry*, ed. Alan Riach and Michael Grieve (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), p. xvii.
[160] *CP1*, p. 454 ('From "The War with England"').

of all my work'.[161] Still intimately identifying with his nation, MacDiarmid loses a real understanding of a genuine, living communitarianism, substituting this for the theoretical communitarianism of communism. It is a problematic difference that this radical individualist is well aware of:

> It is next to impossible still
> For me to bear any other man close – for deep
> Differences surge up like a blast from Hell,
> Yet I know full well
> All the distinctions that divide
> Man from man must be swept aside[162]

As many Western intellectuals became disillusioned with communism in the mid- to late-thirties and left the Party, MacDiarmid's radicalism seeks to stay in touch with an internationalist movement. Claiming to be 'Scotland's Public Enemy No. 1', the bluster of an ideological extremist designed to distract from his geographic isolation, he refuses the escape route from political engagement taken by bourgeois metropolitans and continues to sing praise to an abstract idealism: 'But to Russia for a breath of fresh air!'.[163]

MacDiarmid had a thorny relationship with the CPGB during the thirties, kept at a distance by the Party because of his continued anti-metropolitan Scottish nationalism. However, after rejoining in 1957 he remained a communist for the rest of his life. MacDiarmid was suspicious of middle-class, public-school-educated writers, such as the Auden group, who professed what he thought only a shallow, fleeting radicalism. MacDiarmid claims to have read 'Auden, MacNeice, Day Lewis', but is disappointed not to hear 'the authentic call' of communism, explaining 'You cannot light a match on

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[161] *NSL*, p. 136 (to Peggy Grieve, 26 March 1937).
[162] *CPI*, p. 407 ('Etika Preobrazhennavo Erosa').
[163] *LP*, p. 34; *CPI*, p. 410.

a crumbling wall' of decaying bourgeois, metropolitan culture.[164] In a letter from Whalsay to John Lehmann, MacDiarmid admits:

> I view with deep suspicion the whole nature and tendency of the left wing literary movement in England – knowing that you only have to scratch it to find English Chauvinism and a 'superior' inability to believe that any good can come out of anywhere but Oxford and Cambridge. [165]

Unlike the English left-wing poets, MacDiarmid retained his belief in communism long past its fashionable period and as the previous chapter illustrates had a serious interest in Leninism that predates by a decade that of most of the English literary intelligentsia.

For MacDiarmid, Auden is the type parodied in the latter's 'A Communist to Others' (1933):

> Because you saw but were not indignant
> The invasion of the great malignant
> Cambridge ulcer
> That army intellectual
> Of every kind of liberal
> Smarmy with friendship but of all
> There are none falser.[166]

Auden actually went to Christ Church, Oxford, 'the domain of aristocrats and Etonians'.[167] His mordaciously flippant 'Song for the New Year' (1937) says 'farewell to the drawing-room's civilised cry', illustrating to what he is forced to bid good-bye 'Now matters are settled with gas and with bomb'.[168] MacDiarmid claims to have 'no use' for 'Auden the cheap-minded', partly because his poetry was slow to lose this sniggering Oxbridge undergraduate quality.[169] Perhaps not until leaving England for

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[164] *CP2*, p. 1060 ('British Leftish Poetry, 1930-40').
[165] *L*, p. 594 (to John Lehmann, 6 June 1938).
[166] Auden, 'A Communist to Others', *Poetry of the Thirties*, p. 57.
[167] Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995), p. 52.
[168] Auden, 'Song for the New Year', *Poetry of the Thirties*, p. 47.
[169] *CP2*, p. 1340 ('Choice').

the United States in 1939 and accepting Christianity did Auden's work ripen to maturity.

Notably, and in keeping with other thirties poets, including MacDiarmid, Auden's poetry also displays a tension between the public and private spheres most famously expounded in the epigrammatic epigraph to *The Orators* (1932):

> *Private faces in public places*
> *Are wiser and nicer*
> *Than public faces in private places.*[170]

This is an 'anti-political' cry for freedom from the glasshouse-like ubiquity of totalitarianism, a recognition that 'The Enemy was and still is the politician, i.e., the person who wants to organise the lives of others and make them toe the line'.[171] Such liberal individualism does not necessarily sit well with Auden's thirties radicalism. This idea of the poet as the double man, torn between individual and communal realms, is also suggested by Cecil Day Lewis's 'The Conflict' (1933), which uses images of war to evoke such tension:

> Yet living here,
> As one between two massing powers I live
> Whom neutrality cannot save
> Nor occupation cheer.[172]

Caught in 'no man's land' between the outer of political ideology and the inner of artistic integrity, the poet realizes that 'only ghosts can live / Between two fires'.[173]

In reality, this dualism of position illustrates the middle-class insecurity of poets who briefly used their work to propagandize for a class to which they did not belong and whose advancement would threaten their own cultural and political class power. A

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[170] Auden, *The Orators*, *The English Auden*, p. 59.
[171] Auden, 'The Prolific and the Devourer', *The English Auden*, p. 399.
[172] C. Day Lewis, 'The Conflict', *Poetry of the Thirties*, p. 200.
[173] Ibid.

reversion to inner, spiritual concerns, seemingly expressive of the artistic honesty of bourgeois poets, actually indicates a return to genuine class-consciousness. For Terry Eagleton, this is why committed political art that speaks directly of working-class concerns, for instance, suffers double elitist dismissal as propaganda and, therefore, non-art:

> It is true that for a certain kind of contemporary critic, any historical or ideological contextualization of art is *ipso facto* reductionist; the only difference between such critics and old-style formalists is that while the latter candidly acknowledge this prejudice, elevated it indeed to a whole elaborate theory of art in itself, the former tend to be a little more elusive. It is not, they feel, that the relation between art and history need be in principle a reductive one; it is just that somehow, in all actual manifestations of it, it always is.[174]

MacDiarmid understood this when writing to Francis George Scott in 1932, doubting 'Depth and the Chthonian Image' would be accepted for publication by James Whyte because of the 'idea being assiduously disseminated in certain quarters that since I became a Bolshie I've ceased to do good work'.[175] This Bolshie believed that 'any utterance that is not pure / Propaganda is impure propaganda' and that only 'humbugs condemn' poetry dealing with material rather than spiritual issues.[176] However, the mystical Celtic communist also could write:

> If personal participation were to be demanded,
> Privacy forbidden, and any abstention
> From any show of 'life' – from any activity
> Most people indulge in – construed
> As flight from reality, an insulation from Life,
> All but the most rudimentary forms of life,
> All but the 'life' of the stupidest people,
> Would speedily become impossible.[177]

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[174] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997; 1990), p. 4.
[175] *L*, p. 477 (to F.G. Scott, 22 July 1932).
[176] *CP1*, p. 558 ('Poetry and Propaganda').
[177] *CP1*, p. 575 ('In the Shetlands Islands').

The 'private' poet may be the elect visionary of Celtic communism, but the 'public' political ideologist, attempting from the marginality of Whalsay the internationalist reconstruction of Scotland, fuses his communism with Scottish nationalism to reveal a radical Scottish Republicanism. As Chapter Five of this thesis shows, the poet deals with this conflicted, double-determined nature through a generalist poetry of knowledge, begun in Whalsay, that seeks to subvert the alienating mechanisms of global capitalism while remaining true to the particularity of local culture. Unlike the metropolitan intellectuals of the thirties, MacDiarmid remains faithful to communist utopianism, even through the very real horrors of Stalinism, because he roots its internationalism in the politics of a specific place:

> I am the heir of the great Scottish Republican and Radical traditions and have never been affected by the social stratification, the public-school system, and the other peculiar traditions of England which Auden and his friends manifest so markedly.[178]

Communism represents for him a credo akin to the austere egalitarianism of Calvinism, a spiritual 'conversion', or 'a revolution indeed', allegedly made 'In the Slums of Glasgow', but written in the winds of Whalsay.[179]

Writing to Neil Gunn in 1935, MacDiarmid admits that he thinks 'often of the Montrose days when I was so active and constantly in touch with you and others'; in Whalsay 'even letters are few and far between while I go months at a time without seeing a newspaper'.[180] However, such isolation did not diminish his desire to see a new Scotland:

> I have no idea how you stand now – in relation to Scottish Nationalism and in your general outlook and cultural conclusions; but I personally am implacably opposed to everything I have yet heard voiced in regard to any

[178] *LP*, p. 170.
[179] *CP1*, p. 563 ('In the Slums of Glasgow'); see Edwin Muir, 'Bolshevism and Calvinism' (1934), *Uncollected Scottish Criticism*, ed. Andrew Noble (London & Totowa, NJ: Vision and Barnes & Noble, 1982), pp. 123-30 for an analysis of the similarities between these beliefs.
[180] *L*, p. 256 (to Neil M. Gunn, [1935] dated by ed.).

> of these matters by any of my compatriots and striving incessantly to find means of expression for ideas at the utmost remove from all they can entertain or express.[181]

Expelled from the nationalist movement and intellectually marooned on Whalsay, MacDiarmid sets about constructing a radical, republican vision of a Red Scotland opposed to the ca' canny approach of moderate Scottish nationalism.

MacDiarmid's displacement on the island of Whalsay enabled him to find his artistic voice again in a mystical Celtic communism and radically reorient his politics of place by uncovering a Scottish Republican tradition. In adhering to communism he was not alone among the literary intelligentsia of the devil's decade. These writers staked their faith on the success of communism as a means of rescuing the West from the crisis of civilization that engulfed the capitalist economies between the wars. As Doris Lessing says in *The Golden Notebook* (1962):

> every so often, perhaps once in a century, there's a sort of act of faith. A well of faith fills up and there's an enormous heave forward in one country or another, and that's a forward movement for the whole world. Because it's an act of the imagination – of what is possible for the whole world. In our century it was 1917 in Russia.[182]

Referring to Lessing's book in *Marxism Today* in 1966 the spiritual evolutionist MacDiarmid asks, 'Are knowledge, culture, the arts the real business of human life? No Communist can doubt it for a moment.'[183] However, Lessing's 'act of faith' ended in the apostasy of a generation of mainly young, middle-class Western intellectuals for whom the dream of changing human nature and extending the boundaries of consciousness died in the face of Russian imperialism and Stalinist mass murder.

MacDiarmid's case is more complicated than that of the middle-class intellectuals he so distrusted. His radicalism does have genuine depth, stretching back

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[181] *L*, pp. 256-7 (to Neil M. Gunn, [1935] dated by ed.).
[182] Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (London: Flamingo, 1993; 1962), p. 248.
[183] *RT3*, p. 441 ('The Freedom of Art').

to his days as a socialist councillor in Montrose and his rural, working-class upbringing in Langholm. Through his nationalist Gaelic Idea, and his call for the autonomy of Shetland on Scandinavian lines, MacDiarmid understands the civilizational benefits of difference. Continuing his anti-metropolitan battle for the cultural and political independence of the peripheries, MacDiarmid's theoretical designs for Shetland find further application in Scotland. In Whalsay in the 1930s he fuses his Scottish nationalism with international communism, finding a radical Scottish Republicanism that grows from the traditions of a metaphysical Scotland and through which he will attempt the dismantling of bourgeois Anglo-Scotland:

> You've had your usual supply of so-called great sons
> In the period in question, but their filial regard
> Wouldn't do credit, it seems, to a skunk's ones,
> And if you still think that this verdict's too hard,
> To problems a damned sight harder you're tied,
> And the only men who have really tried
> To solve them are a few on the rebel side,
> Despised, rejected, hounded down and decried
> By the fools on whom like a fool you've relied.[184]

As the next chapter argues, it is those on 'the rebel side' such as John Maclean, rejected by the educational establishment of Scotland, whom the autodidact MacDiarmid – through 'that arduous study by which alone even a Scot *pur sang* to-day can effectively re-Scoticize himself' and the nation – relies on to challenge the anglified Scottish educational system of capitalism and construct a radical Scottish Republic.[185]

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[184] *CP1*, p. 461 ('Scotland's Pride').
[185] *LP*, p. 28.

Chapter 4 **THE AUTODIDACT**

> There is very little Scottish Education in Scotland today.[1]

> The continued erosion of the generalist approach to education ensures that the entire system comes to exist as a straight reinforcement of the prevailing right-wing authority.[2]

One of the crucial ideological places where MacDiarmid developed his politics was the Scottish educational system. This autodidact had no narrowly specialized, professional interest in education but a lifelong and committed engagement to changing the fundamental tenets of teaching in Scotland. Writing in *Lucky Poet* the 'Scottish republican and revolutionary Socialist' MacDiarmid claims, 'I have devoted a great deal of my life to Scottish education'.[3] MacDiarmid believes that education should be a general preparation for life that will 'enable the child to develop his personality to the full and to realize all that he has it in him to be'.[4] He hopes that such successful self-realization of the students in the nation's schools and universities will in turn institute the creation of an independent Scotland's true radically republican political identity. For this to happen, however, the commercial and philistine agenda of the teaching profession must give way to 'the place where reality, properly speaking, begins': the imagination.[5]

When Christopher Grieve's parents moved their young family to Parliament Square in the centre of Langholm in 1899 they unwittingly introduced their eldest son to a realm that was to dominate the poet's adult life, one through which he would both

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[1] *A*, p. 12 ('Albyn: or Scotland and the Future').
[2] James Kelman, *'And The Judges Said... ': Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2002), p. 163.
[3] *LP*, p. 341.
[4] *LP*, p. 140.
[5] *LP*, p. 342.

challenge the power of metropolitan English rule and conform to the dictates of native nationalist mythology. MacDiarmid's book learning – never systematic, or systematized by a university education, always driven by his own idiosyncratic needs as a poet – began with his omnivorous trawling through the Langholm Library that occupied the upper storey of the building in which the family lived. MacDiarmid claims it was access to this library 'that was the great determining factor' in his becoming a poet.[6] He boasts somewhat fantastically in *Lucky Poet* of having read every book in the library before the age of fourteen, some twelve thousand volumes.

Such exaggerations in the cause of self-styling are common throughout MacDiarmid's career and are hardly unknown among poets: one of MacDiarmid's own heroes, fellow modernist, political extremist and autobiographical fabulist Ezra Pound, also preferred a poetics of lengthy, generalist displays of learning.[7] However, MacDiarmid's enthusiastic yet somewhat haphazard pursuit of knowledge also strikes a characteristically Scottish note. Referring again to *Lucky Poet* we find MacDiarmid, once more in braggart mode, claiming, 'I could go up into that library *in the dark* and find any book I wanted', a library that was, however, 'strangely deficient in Scottish books'.[8] It took this Scottish autodidact until the age of twenty-seven to find his way out of the darkness into which Scottish culture had allowed itself to fall as 'an inevitable consequence of the relation of Scotland to England'.[9] This chapter refers to MacDiarmid as an autodidact because he did not attend a university; it does not imply he had no formal education at all. Yet, according to MacDiarmid, a Scottish university education would not have remedied this gap in his knowledge of the native culture

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[6] *LP*, p. 8.
[7] Robert Crawford describes Pound and MacDiarmid as 'man-myths', *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 247
[8] *LP*, p. 8; my emphasis.
[9] *LP*, p. 15.

more successfully than the poet could achieve by his own autodidactic, generalist endeavours.

MacDiarmid understands that education has been central to the politically designed anglicization of Scottish experience and the shaping of Scotland as a political place: 'The Scottish educational system, once the finest in Europe, has been poisoned by English influences.'[10] By exerting metropolitan pedagogical control over Scottish education, the British state seeks to secure the political conformity of its potentially unruly northern province. MacDiarmid believes that an Anglocentric educational policy ensures that 'Scottish interests are systematically subordinated to English'.[11] Even Scottish intellectuals 'belong to England rather than Scotland'.[12] Crucially for MacDiarmid, the cultural and political denationalization of those who should be formulating the politics of this place, the nation's rightful leaders, means that 'the Scottish *Intelligentsia* is dead'.[13]

From examining MacDiarmid's engagement with particular Scottish localities and how these influence his internationalism, this chapter returns to the actual and ideological place central to this intellectual's politics: Scotland. It analyses the self-taught MacDiarmid's attitude to a Scottish education system he believes to be denationalized by anglification and bourgeois in its enslavement to the monetary dictates of capitalism. The chapter argues that, in what he believes to be the absence of a Scottish intelligentsia, the former trainee-teacher MacDiarmid looks to the work of educational heretics for liberation from the specialized confines of British capitalist educational conformity. The generalism of individuals such as the nationalist George Davie and the communist John Maclean helps MacDiarmid to construct an oppositional educational strategy at one with his politics of place in its fostering of

[10] *RTI*, p. 65 ('After George Robey').
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

personal, political and cultural difference. MacDiarmid's autodidactic generalism is honed by experience as a local journalist in Montrose and tested in the intellectual isolation of Whalsay. Drawn from the older educational traditions of a metaphysical Scotland, such generalism helps him to uncover a radical Scottish Republican tradition, suppressed by the anglification and capitalist specialization of the Scottish education system, through which to envisage an internationalist Red Scotland.

'The Autodidact' begins by looking at the myth-history of Scottish educational superiority before examining how this idea is challenged in MacDiarmid's poetry and prose, in particular *Contemporary Scottish Studies*. Using material from the suppressed 'Red Scotland' that exists in the National Library of Scotland, the chapter will concentrate on certain aspects of MacDiarmid's engagement with specific figures in Scottish education, in particular A.S. Neill, Patrick Geddes, Davie and Maclean. By focusing on the importance to MacDiarmid of their educational generalism, the chapter argues that the autodidact poet devises an internationalist politics of place through which to attempt the ideological reformulation of Scotland. In a provincialized nation lacking a functioning tradition in which his politics of place can come home, MacDiarmid reconstructs a Scottish Republicanism from the theoretical ammunition provided by this all-male group in order to mount his radical assault on the renowned Scottish education system.

Scottish education is the best in the world: when MacDiarmid first began his contributions to the *Scottish Educational Journal*, to be collected and issued as *Contemporary Scottish Studies* in 1926, this nineteenth-century Scottish shibboleth had lost little of its potential potency in stirring the hearts, if not exercising the minds, of the couthie kailyarders the iconoclastic poet-propagandist was seeking to upset and supplant. According to Alan Riach, the initial publication of the essays 'caused a

furore'.[14] Within the pages of the *Scottish Educational Journal*, a specialized publication for teachers, MacDiarmid's contentious contribution certainly caused waves. But perhaps the ripples produced by MacDiarmid's assault on contemporary Scottish culture had greater ideological circumference precisely because the articles were to be read primarily by teachers and those interested in education in Scotland. By fusing cultural and educational concerns in this manner MacDiarmid is laying down a challenge to Scottish teachers. As the front line of the cultural workforce they should not simply be 'lickspittles of the English Ascendancy', purveyors of old ideas and provincial cultural products, or manufacturers of capitalism's compliant workforce, but promulgators of a Scottish national renaissance.[15] However, for this national revolution to take place at all involves a fundamental questioning of the tenets upon which Scottish education rests.

We shall return to MacDiarmid's attack on Scottish culture in *Contemporary Scottish Studies* shortly. However, it may be worthwhile attempting a brief sketch of some of the presiding principles of the Scottish education that is also, by implication, being criticized in MacDiarmid's book. These tenets may not directly reflect reality but rather point to what Robert Anderson calls 'a meta-history of myth and idealization'.[16] For Anderson, the presiding myth is the 'belief that Scottish education was peculiarly "democratic"'.[17] He goes on to identify four main features of the democratic myth: 'universality' – a national school system as laid down in Knox's seminal *First Book of Discipline* in 1560; the 'lad o' pairts' – the poor, yet talented, rural boy who is afforded the opportunity to climb out of his class through education; the classless society – rich and poor mixing at school; and 'the parochial tradition' –

[14] Alan Riach, 'Demolition Man: An Introduction to *Contemporary Scottish Studies*', *CSS*, p. vii.
[15] *LP*, p. 149.
[16] R.D. Anderson, *Scottish Education since the Reformation* ([n.p.]: The Economic and Social History Society of Scotland, 1997), p. 2.
[17] R.D. Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland: Schools & Universities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 1.

social fluidity between the parish school, the burgh school and the university.[18] Anderson is sceptical that the democratic myth functioned completely in the manner described, although he does allow its claims at least partial validity. However, what makes it so difficult for historians to unravel the sociological facts from the educational mythologies is that the latter have become an important marker of Scottish identity.

David McCrone agrees with Anderson that the seemingly more democratic nature of education in Scotland is an important mythic signifier for the Scots of a Scottish character and society that are supposedly more egalitarian than their English equivalents. Like Anderson, however, McCrone also understands that the concept of myth does not necessarily invalidate such ideas. Instead, he prefers to read the meaning of myth as 'self-evident belief rather than a falsehood'.[19] This interpretation assumes that the myth does indeed have some historical validity, not only because it may have some factual basis, but also because the real history of the nation is inseparable from its myth-history, each informing, revealing and concealing the other. This is a postmodern understanding that the writing of history is a self-conscious, contextualizing process, not a mere regurgitation of the facts. Attempts to strip the metaphysical outer layer of myth from the history of a nation in order to reveal the true, essential Scotland shimmering beneath may simply lead to a partial denuding of the concept 'Scotland'. This does not mean that myths are should not be challenged, or that the future of a nation is imprisoned completely by its past; but it does means that there is a complicated interrelation between myth and reality that historians cannot ignore.

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[18] See Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland*, pp. 1-6.
[19] David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London: Routledge, 1998; 1992), p. 92.

As the modernist contemporary of Joyce and Eliot, MacDiarmid understands the confused, yet creative symbiosis of myth and reality. However, he believed much of Scotland's myth-history to be irredeemably tainted by Anglo-Scottish opportunistic canniness and kailyard provincialism and therefore in dire need of the complete discarding attempted in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*:

> No' Edinburgh Castle or the fields
> O' Bannockburn or Flodden
> Are dernin' wi' the miskent soul
> Scotland sae lang has hod'n.[20]

What is important when considering MacDiarmid's contribution to the educational debate is the supposed superiority of the Scottish system, particularly with historical reference to that of the English. From the vantage point of a provincialized twentieth-century Scotland, MacDiarmid could only view such an idea as complacent compensation for a lack of direct rule of Scottish affairs in a post-Union stateless nation:

> Tell me o' love o' country
> Content to see it decay,
> And ony ither paradox
> Ye think o' by the way.
> I doot it needs a Hegel
> Sic opposites to fuse;
> Oor education's failin'
> And canna gie's the views
> That were peculiar to us
> Afore oor vision narrowed
> And gar'd us think it time
> The claith was owre the parrot![21]

'The Parrot Cry' of a British Scotland is that the Scots would be nothing if it weren't for the Union with England. But paradoxically, what accompanies such

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[20] *CP1*, p. 152 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[21] *CP1*, p. 193 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).

sentiments is the idea that many aspects of Scottish civic society, such as education, are still superior to that of their southern counterparts. For MacDiarmid, such strange transpositions of healthy nationhood are a species of propaganda designed to keep Scotland in a deadlock of anglified mediocrity, with neither the confidence nor the institutional wherewithal to break such a hold. MacDiarmid's destructive urge to lambast every aspect of modern Scottish life, in particular those areas that the Scots are especially proud of, arises from his desire to construct an autonomous politics of place.

MacDiarmid attempts to adopt a creative myth in *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, which includes 'The Parrot Cry'. Spiritual themes, such as the creation myth of the Curly Snake and the muse Athikte, combine in an attempt to give Scotland an 'Unconscious goal of history'.[22] But the endeavour is compromised due to the irreconcilable tension of a national poet-saviour who believes that Scotland can be saved by a new myth resurrected from a dying Gaeldom while being crucified on old myths, such as that of educational superiority, perpetuated in a post-Reformation British culture. Scotland's pride in its democratic education system is at one with its excessive regard for past glories that help to mask present harsh realities:

> There is no country in Europe perhaps whose people are more perfervid in their lip-service to it. There is certainly none where there is a greater discrepancy between the professed pride – and the actual facts.[23]

The aim of the articles that became *Contemporary Scottish Studies* is to convey the glaring cultural discrepancy between a provincialized kailyard Scotland and the internationalist ideas of the Scottish Renaissance movement to the teachers of Scottish education.

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[22] *CP1*, p. 287 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[23] *A*, p. 46 ('The Present Position of Scottish Music').

When he wrote most of the articles for *Contemporary Scottish Studies* MacDiarmid was living in Montrose writing lyrical and metaphysical poetry in a distinctly Scottish voice. He was involved in political activity at a local and national level, being a ceaseless propagandist for Scottish nationalism and international socialism. With *Contemporary Scottish Studies* MacDiarmid also proves himself to be a perceptive modernist critic and thorough student of contemporary Scottish culture. Indeed, as the *Scottish Educational Journal* was registered as a newspaper it could be said that MacDiarmid's occupation as a journalist helped position him at the centre of cultural criticism in Scotland, a location more securely held in the early twenty-first century by those working within the specialized, curricular-bound dictates of the university department. The *Scottish Educational Journal* was published by the Educational Institute of Scotland from 47 Moray Place in Edinburgh. The teaching union the EIS, founded in 1847, started publishing its own journal, the *Educational News*, in 1876. This became the *Scottish Educational Journal* in 1918.

Scottish culture had begun to move towards a more distinctly national approach at the beginning of the twentieth century, with Edinburgh University gaining a chair of Scottish history in 1901 and the *Scottish Historical Review* appearing for the first time in 1903. However, these were tentative and often sternly opposed first steps on the road to national self-recovery. Robert Anderson tells us that the *Educational News* (cited from 7 November 1885) was a trenchantly Unionist publication:

> Parochialism and sentimentality were always the main charges against those who argued for a distinctive Scottish identity, along with the brisk historical view put by the *Educational News* that 'until Scotland was united to England it was one of the poorest and most wretched countries in Europe. Since the Union it has flourished, and become rich and prosperous.' Such views were not imposed from London by the SED, or from Edinburgh by Anglicized university professors, but were to be found at the heart of Scottish educational culture.[24]

[24] R.D. Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People 1750-1918*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 213.

Although Anderson makes the point 'that for the Scottish élite in the years before 1914 nationalism was not the opposite of unionism but fused with it', for a MacDiarmid who served in an imperial First World War, purportedly 'for little Belgium's sake', such politics could only be dismissed as inferiorism.[25] MacDiarmid wishes to reconstruct along radical lines a Scottish education that has 'been utterly de-Scoticized and adapted in the most shocking fashion to suit the exigencies of English Imperialism and the Capitalist system'.[26] He will attempt to do so by attacking the imperialist and capitalist culture taught in Scotland's schools.

It is fitting that the first essay in the *Contemporary Scottish Studies* series is devoted to John Buchan. Given their political differences, MacDiarmid is perhaps uncharacteristically kind to Buchan in this essay, possibly because of the inclusion of 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' in Buchan's recently published selection of Scottish poetry *The Northern Muse* (1924), but also due to the older man's 'encouragement and help' in the early part of MacDiarmid's career.[27] MacDiarmid as Grieve dedicated his first book, *Annals of the Five Senses* (1923), to Buchan and continues the compliment in his 1925 essay from the *Scottish Educational Journal*, calling Buchan's *The Northern Muse* 'a definitive book':

> It was, indeed, compiled in the renaissance spirit – literary merit being the criterion of selection. It was not too rigorously applied, perhaps, but Buchan thus quietly, but decisively, aligned himself with the younger men who were clamouring for the erection of literary standards in Scotland comparable to those obtaining elsewhere.[28]

MacDiarmid uses Buchan's anthology in order to elucidate his own 'literary standards': that Scottish culture should be evaluated in international, not purely

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[25] Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People 1750-1918*, p. 212; *CP1*, p. 451 ('Towards a New Scotland').
[26] *LP*, p. 229.
[27] *Annals*, p. 3.
[28] *CSS*, p. 10 ('John Buchan').

national, terms. In light of such criteria, MacDiarmid assesses Buchan's own work, finding it 'very moderately-sized in the British scale', while 'his work as a novelist disappears entirely in the light of European assessment'.[29] Although the *Scottish Educational Journal* was a slightly more progressive organ than the *Educational News* from which it emerged, an assessment such as MacDiarmid's of a writer of John Buchan's international standing as being – in the new Scottish Renaissance criteria – almost nugatory in literary terms, is a radical proposition. MacDiarmid's proposals for Scottish education, dictated by the same internationalist credo as his literary pronouncements, could be classed as revolutionary.

Consistent with MacDiarmid's nationalism is his understanding that each individual nation could have something different to contribute to world culture, the individual and national Nietzschean goal of self-creation 'To be yoursel', whatever that may be'.[30] Clearly, however, this is only possible if the political and civic institutions that help promote and disseminate the ideas particular to a specific nation are not under foreign control. For MacDiarmid, Scottish education is provincialized 'by the English connexion and by the absurd over-influences of English literature, history, politics, and the English language'.[31] One task of the Scottish Renaissance movement is to ensure that Scottish education aligns itself with international tendencies in the field, these being what we would now term postcolonial in direction, and so reclaim native cultural and political traditions through which to fashion an independent politics of place.

MacDiarmid succinctly spells out his desire to emphasize the particularity of local culture through an autonomous educational system in his 1927 manifesto-essay 'Albyn: or Scotland and the Future':

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[29] *CSS*, p. 11 ('John Buchan').
[30] *CP1*, p. 127 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[31] *LP*, p. 140.

> The type of international education which is everywhere gaining ground today is that which seeks to perfect, and even to intensify, different cultures already existent among different peoples, and sets for its ideal that each people has, first, the right to its own interpretation of life; and, second, the duty of understanding, and sympathizing with, the different interpretations given by its neighbours as fully as possible. Back of this type of international education lies the belief that differentiation in matters of culture is more valuable to life than a stereotyped homogeneity.[32]

MacDiarmid goes on to explain that he believes a revolt against industrialism combined with English political and cultural exhaustion to be at the root of the 'increasing – if still insignificant – Scoticization of Scottish education during recent years'.[33] This interpretation undermines his perfectly lucid earlier defence of the nationalist-internationalist symbiosis central to his politics of place. By taking accountability for Scottish affairs away from the Scots and placing it with the rather fatalistic idea, fashionable in the 1920s, of the Spenglerian cultural cycle, MacDiarmid can believe that an essentialist Scotland's historical destiny, the nation's unconscious, metaphysical goal, will finally be revealed. Perhaps it is symptomatic of the anglified system of education in Scotland as MacDiarmid found it that responsibility for change could not be confidently attributed to native influence but only be explicable by reference to 'some foreign philosopher'.[34] This is not internationalism in its true sense – that of a self-assured, yet unchauvinistic nation, responding positively to external influence – but a provincial's attempt to escape English cultural power through recourse to a continental European thinker. With *Contemporary Scottish Studies* MacDiarmid asserts 'Auld Scottish instincts' with which to challenge the prevailing order.[35]

If the bulk of the essays in *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, what we shall call the superstructure of the book, concern Scottish culture and MacDiarmid's attempt to

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[32] *A*, p. 12 ('Albyn: or Scotland and the Future').
[33] *A*, p. 13.
[34] *CP1*, p. 87 (*A Drunk Man looks at the Thistle*).
[35] Ibid.

ignite what he saw as a stagnant Scottish scene, then the foundation or base of the project relates the educational process to the cultural life of the nation. In his introduction to *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, Alan Riach correctly cites 'the quintessential proposition at the heart of these essays' as being the 'balance between creativity (among artists, teachers and students) and education (as process and as product functioning in terms of a culture's prevalent attitude towards experience)'.[36] This is best illustrated in 'A.S. Neill and our Educational System'. MacDiarmid calls Neill 'the only Scottish educationalist to-day of the slightest significance from the point of view of real education'.[37] MacDiarmid elucidates what he means by 'real education' far more clearly with reference to his objections to the ideas of the socialist James Maxton than through his concurrence with Neill. According to MacDiarmid, Maxton wants the education system in Scotland to be based on a rediscovery of the 'national characteristics' of 'independence, thrift, courage and so forth'.[38] For MacDiarmid, it is 'the sorriest Chauvinism to imply that there is anything distinctively Scottish about' such features.[39]

This appears to be an anti-essentialist MacDiarmid, one keen to free Scotland and the concept of nationality from the restriction of stereotyping. However, MacDiarmid generally only applies such anti-essentialism to a post-Union Scotland. Independence and courage are qualities spuriously at odds with the reality of a nation that refuses to take political control of its own affairs and teaches mainly English culture to Scottish schoolchildren, and thrift is another term for the Anglo-Scottish opportunistic canniness that benefits from post-Union economics. Although he believes that the 'national spirit is something apart from such qualities' and could therefore manifest itself in any direction, for MacDiarmid 'the distinctive elements of

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[36] Alan Riach, 'Demolition Man: An Introduction to *Contemporary Scottish Studies*', *CSS*, p. xix.
[37] *CSS*, p. 294 ('A.S. Neill and our Educational System').
[38] *CSS*, p. 290.
[39] *CSS*, p. 292.

Scottish psychology' are unaffected by the Union settlement, being inherent in traditions descended from an older metaphysical Scotland.[40]

MacDiarmid wants a return to 'first principles', a concept that is central to the traditional generalism of a philosophical education in a metaphysical Scotland.[41] In the context of A.S. Neill's educational ideas, MacDiarmid's description of what a return to first principles means falls back on an essentialist view of the self:

> The present educational system in Scotland – like every other educational *system* – is concerned with the superficial self. Real education – upon which everything that is vital in life depends – is concerned solely with the fundamental self; it is in direct opposition to everything that tends to create the superficial self, beyond the working minimum of sanity, and especially, to anything that tends to so harden that crust as to inhibit or handicap the fundamental self, or give a direction to life from without rather than purely. from within.[42]

MacDiarmid values Neill's educational experimentalism for its attempt to allow the child to find a path without external imposition, to discover her/his true self without being told what that self should be. The poet suggests that this may even have beneficial consequences for the emergence of Scottish nationalism: if individuals should be allowed to discover for themselves, and in their own way, their potentialities and the possibilities of self-creation, then why not the community of individuals that is the nation?

Neill must be counted as a Scottish Renaissance writer when he states in *A Dominie Abroad* (1922), 'We cannot be international unless we are first national' and 'that internationalism must be inter-nationalism'.[43] Looking to construct an internationalist politics of Scottish place, MacDiarmid believes that 'the present system largely inhibits or distorts' any prospect that Scotland may rediscover what he

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[40] CSS, pp. 292, 293 ('A.S. Neill and our Educational System').
[41] *CSS*, p. 291.
[42] CSS, p. 294.
[43] A.S. Neill, *A Dominie Abroad* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1922), pp. 67, 234.

liked to call its *ur-motives*, traditions he thought were fundamental to any hope of recovering political self-determination.[44] If the purpose of education under capitalism is to turn out non-individuals, fit only to be compliant in the workplace, and the Scottish polity is controlled by foreign capital and English culture, then only a return to the first principles of a non-vocational, non-materialistic metaphysical education, concerned not with the letter but with the spirit, will free the individual and nation to be themselves:

> And let the lesson be – to be yersel's,
> Ye needna fash gin it's to be ocht else.
> To be yersel's – and to mak' that worth bein'.
> Nae harder job to mortals has been gi'en.[45]

If the real, essential nation is the pre-Union metaphysical Scotland, then only a return to its generalist educational traditions will free a Scottish intelligentsia to fashion a radically independent politics of place. The Nietzschean dictum of self-creation of *A Drunk Man*, which the poet applies as resolutely to the nation as to the individual, is what MacDiarmid wants the teachers of Scotland to learn, and it is also the lesson taught by the Scottish dominie A.S. Neill.

Alexander Sutherland Neill was a Scottish teacher of whom MacDiarmid could certainly approve. Born only nine years before MacDiarmid on 17 October 1883 in the Angus town of Forfar – where MacDiarmid worked briefly as a journalist for the *Forfar Review* in 1913 and which he described to his former teacher George Ogilvie as 'the booziest place in [*sic*] Earth' – Neill's small-town childhood must have borne remarkable similarities to MacDiarmid's own in Langholm, and to the book that was to be a seminal literary influence in Neill's life, George Douglas Brown's anti-kailyard classic *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901).[46] Teaching loomed large in Neill's

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[44] *CSS*, p. 295 ('A.S. Neill and our Educational System').
[45] *CP1*, p. 107 (*A Drunk Man looks at the Thistle*).
[46] *L*, p. 12 (to George Ogilvie, 20 August 1916).

life from an early age as both his parents were in the profession. In Forfar, as in Langholm, the teacher was a central part of the life of the town, a figure to be respected, even feared. As Neill says in his autobiography, 'In those far-off days the village dominie was the oracle, for, apart from the minister, he was the only educated man in the village.'[47]

Leaving Forfar, Neill eventually made it to Edinburgh University where, taught by Saintsbury, he gained a degree in English literature. He was later to express disillusion about his education at Edinburgh saying, 'a specialised university education is no education at all' and that he had 'no pride in being a graduate'.[48] However, it is likely that, with the weight of parental expectation, Neill's objections to education date back to his early school days in Forfar. On becoming a teacher himself, Neill was to experience all the restrictions and frustrations of teaching in a small Scottish school that the one-time trainee-teacher MacDiarmid was so glad to have escaped:

> If I had gone on and qualified and become a teacher, my sojourn in the profession would have been of short duration in any event, and I would have been dismissed as Thomas Davidson and John Maclean and my friend, A.S. Neill, were dismissed. [49]

MacDiarmid valorizes radical Scottish educational rebels whose generalist values he approves in order to attack the cultural and political circumscription of a metropolitan capitalist education of specialization.

Whereas MacDiarmid attacks Scottish teachers as a professional type – 'for the Scottish teaching profession as a whole I can have nothing good to say; the vast majority are hopeless Safety-Firsters' – writing in a poem dedicated to Neill that 'they're lucky to earn a livin' / Wi' what they learnt at twelve', Neill carved out a

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[47] A.S. Neill, *Neill! Neill! Orange Peel!: A Personal View of Ninety Years* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973), p. 16.
[48] A.S. Neill, *Neill! Neill! Orange Peel!*, pp. 117, 237.
[49] *LP*, p. 229.

vocation for himself through criticism of the specialized type of teaching conducted in Scottish schools:

> I want to teach my bairns how to live; the Popular Educator wants to teach them how to make a living. There is a distinction between the two ideals.
>
> The Scotch Education Department would seem to have some of the Educator's aspirations. It demands Gardening, Woodwork, Cookery; in short, it is aiming at turning out practical men and women.
>
> My objection to men and women is that they are too practical.[50]

MacDiarmid also objects to the educational aim of training 'the child specifically for a vocation, so that in the struggle for employment and a career he may start with an advantage over his untrained contemporaries'.[51] Coming at the problem of educational, cultural and political sterility from different angles as they do, one a poet the other an educationalist, the two men still share a deep desire to change the nature of the educational system in particular, each seeing this as the key to changing the nature of humanity in general. Both are socialists with a disdain for democracy, small-town boys who should have been that apotheosis of Scottish education, the lad o' pairts, but instead turned rebel poet and educational heretic. Frustrated in a Scotland that isn't listening to their modernist message, psychological outsiders in a nation they think is almost irremediably provincial, MacDiarmid and Neill exile themselves geographically, the poet to Shetland and the educationalist to Hellerau and then, more famously, Summerhill. From these small places, each believing himself to be a prophet without honour in his own country, they spread an internationalist gospel. But it is their withering and remarkably similar analysis of their native educational system that is of most interest here.

A.S. Neill's *Is Scotland Educated?* was published in 1936, the pivotal, perhaps the ultimate, year of the Scottish Renaissance movement as MacDiarmid in Whalsay

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[50] *CP2*, p. 1261 ('The Teaching Profession'); A.S. Neill, *A Dominie's Log* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1915), p. 46.
[51] *LP*, p. 140.

moved to the John Maclean-Scottish Republican line. Issued as part of Routledge's 'The Voice of Scotland' series of which MacDiarmid had assumed editorship after the death of Lewis Grassic Gibbon, it also released MacDiarmid's *bête noire*, Edwin Muir's *Scott and Scotland.* MacDiarmid's own radical contribution 'Red Scotland', originally entitled 'What Lenin Has Meant to Scotland', never saw publication.

Is Scotland Educated? is a book that could have been written by MacDiarmid from the distance of his Shetland home. He was certainly to approve of its radical message, believing it to be a 'useful little *exposé* of our much-boosted Scottish education'.[52] Neill was later to call it 'a poor book full of pudding to hide my gross ignorance of Scotland'.[53] It is undoubtedly a deeply personal and disappointed book, but this does not lessen the polemical power of its relevance to cultural history. Written in 1936, when CPGB membership began to climb with the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, it is intensely anti-capital:

> Capitalism very cleverly selects the brighter children of the proletariat, sends them to secondary schools and then to university, thus taking them away from the class to which they belong and might conceivably fight, and turning them into castrated black-coated servants of capitalism.[54]

MacDiarmid also bemoans the reactionary nature of university life, seeing it as a deliberate policy to cut off the Scottish university student from the wider community in halls of residence in order to replicate the fascist-barracks atmosphere of the English boarding school – 'Consider the accent of some of these hostelised students already!' – and so foster a common class feeling among students trained for national leadership in 'an upper-class Anglicised basis of life'.[55]

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[52] *LP*, p. 143.
[53] A.S. Neill, quoted in Jonathan Croall, *Neill of Summerhill: The Permanent Rebel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 228.
[54] A.S. Neill, *Is Scotland Educated?* (London: Routledge, 1936), p. 34.
[55] *RT3*, p. 279 ('The Future of the Scottish Universities').

MacDiarmid agrees with George Davie that this change signified a deprivation, not only in the loss of the Scottish tradition of boarding in digs within the town community, but in that the type of student produced by the university system would no longer have, according to MacDiarmid, 'the rugged independent petty-bourgeois and semi-proletarian character' or, for Davie, be 'the independent-minded intellectual type', being instead 'a public-school type'.[56] Davie sees this separation of town and gown as part of the movement toward specialization in university education: within the university itself, departments and different subject areas denied intellectually fruitful contact with each other due to the demotion of a democratically disposed generalist philosophy; in terms of the university's relations with the outside world, an elitist, capitalist institution, holding itself aloof from a local community from which it draws very few of its students. As we shall see, for Davie, the usurping of the Scottish generalist tradition in nineteenth-century Scottish universities corresponds to a significant loss of national(ist) feeling among the Scottish intelligentsia. However, in terms of MacDiarmid's and Neill's anti-capitalism, we can also see encroaching specialization in the nineteenth century as an inevitable accompaniment to the division of labour inherent in a flourishing capitalist system.

It is Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, completed in 1775 and a book that Arthur Herman calls 'the *Summa* of the Scottish Enlightenment', which best describes the mechanics of capitalism:

> Smith explains how the business of civilisation gets done, by isolating the basic principle that explains all social improvement: the division of labour. This is Smith's term. The idea itself probably originated with David Hume, who called it 'the partition of employments.' We use another, perhaps better, word for it: *specialisation.*[57]

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[56] *RT3*, p. 279 ('The Future of the Scottish Universities'); George Elder Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999; 1961), p. 304.

[57] Arthur Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Scots' Invention of the Modern World* (London: Fourth Estate, 2002), p. 179.

Herman goes on to explain that Smith's division of labour 'becomes particularly pronounced in commercial society'.[58] Those on the political Right, particularly Thatcherite think-tanks in the 1980s, have claimed Smith as one of their own, the theoretical father of modern capitalism. But Smith also realized the potentially damaging effects for workers of the narrowing influence of the division of labour, with each individual confined within the sometimes deadening limitations of their occupation. Hence the importance of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) with its idea of sympathy so crucial to the radical Burns and which according to James Buchan 'was the work that established Scottish philosophy in the first rank'.[59]

According to James Kelman, specialization undemocratically leads to the elitist separation of those who know from those who, apparently, don't: 'Whole areas of experience and knowledge are hived off from ordinary men and women and children. Society is controlled by those who are "paid to know", the specialists.'[60] For Kelman, as for many on the Left – such as Noam Chomsky, the subject of Kelman's 'A Reading from Noam Chomsky and the Scottish Tradition in the Philosophy of Common Sense' – the specialized division of labour is a capitalistic stratagem that disguises the reality that those in political control are no more inherently knowledgeable and have no more right to knowledge than those deliberately marginalized from power-knowledge through the specialization system. If the university educated fail to make a connection with the working population then for Neill they are simply servants of capitalism:

> Our Scots universities are conservative of the right (Tory) or of the left (Liberal). Psychologically there is no difference between a Tory and a Liberal: both support capitalism and the Old Men of Life. Our professional classes, university trained, show much less originality than our Clydeside

[58] Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 179.
[59] James Buchan, *Capital of the Mind: How Edinburgh Changed the World* (London: John Murray, 2003), p. 119.
[60] Kelman, *'And The Judges Said...': Essays*, p. 145.

> workers show. That is mainly because a university training does not deal in fundamentals.[61]

Neill means by 'fundamentals' a creative, general sense of interest in the humanity of others that could perhaps help to undermine the money-code of capitalism. However, since the universities are amongst the biggest beneficiaries of this code the specialists that they send out into the world, as MacDiarmid's 'Ode for the 350th Anniversary of Edinburgh University' makes clear, reinforce rather than challenge capitalism:

> Who would supply if it wasn't for us
> The young officers always ready to throw
> Their own lives – and other people's – away
> For no good cause so far as they know
> Since the University never has taught
> Discrimination in details like that?
> O we've plenty to do and no mistake
> What with black-legging, snobbery, sport and so on.
> Let others worry over serious affairs.
> We're the Fascisti who think of ourselves alone[62]

If, as Neill contends, 'Scottish education is a bulwark of entrenched capitalism' and, as such, anti-creative and reactionary, then for both men the connections between the capitalist ethos in Scottish schools and universities and the importance of the Kirk in the Scottish educational system is of great importance: 'Castrated by Calvinism or by Capitalism? By both: they work well together'.[63]

For MacDiarmid, the cultural life of a provincialized Scotland is sterile because the education system 'is rooted in Calvinistic repressions'.[64] This makes it almost impossible for a schoolchild to prepare for, perhaps even to desire, a career in the arts

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[61] Neill, *Is Scotland Educated?*, p. 33.
[62] *CP2*, p. 1285 ('Ode for the 350th Anniversary of Edinburgh University').
[63] Neill, *Is Scotland Educated?*, pp. 35, 85.
[64] *A*, p. 49 ('The Present Position of Scottish Music').

because of the parochial fear of idiosyncratic, unconventional creative expression, coupled with the parental dread of potential penury:

> The last thing that would occur to the vast majority of Scottish parents is to train up any child to be an artist. The typical Scottish father or mother would be horrified at the mere idea of any child of theirs wanting to be anything so eccentric as a composer. There is no doubt that this attitude to the arts – a legacy of the Reformation – is largely responsible for Scotland's deplorable position and the miserable tone of contemporary Scottish life. 'Where there is no vision the people perish.'[65]

Citing Proverbs 29: 18 – also quoted by Jean Brodie, fellow elitist ('all my pupils are the crème de la crème'), political absolutist and Calvinist, of whom Sandy Stranger believes 'she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end' – the elect MacDiarmid uses his childhood knowledge of the King James Bible (1611) to condemn the bleak uniformity of a Scottish Calvinist education, envisioning instead his own transfiguration of the commonplace.[66] For MacDiarmid, wishing to create an educational approach that individualizes Scots who will then potentially develop a self-determining politics of Scottish place, the consequences of marrying the beliefs of 'Commercial Calvinists' with education have been disastrous for the creative and political possibilities of the nation:

> I visited Reformation Scotland
> With Fearghal long before that
> And saw all that would come to pass
> To the land in that foul trap caught,
> And what have I found since then
> But centuries' additional cause
> To deplore the scholarship lost
> And the ancient laws,
> Everyman a priompallán now?[67]

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[65] *A*, p. 49 ('The Present Position of Scottish Music').
[66] Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (London: Penguin, 1965; 1961), pp. 8, 120; Alan Bold calls *The Prime* 'a persuasive study of the élitist mentality' in his *Muriel Spark*, (London & New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 71.
[67] *LP*, p. 149; *CP1*, p. 213 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*); MacDiarmid's 'Notes' gloss *Priompallán* as dung-beetle, thus raising the spectre, *à la* Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' (1915), of the existential nobody of modernity.

What a Calvinist education produces is a philistine, anti-intellectual Everyman, the canny Scot of a false Anglo-Scotland. For a MacDiarmid in search of the supremely metaphysical Scot, this is to be no better than an insect.

In two essays from *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, both entitled 'Creative Art and the Scottish Educational System', MacDiarmid applies his elitism to the '"educated people" of Scotland to-day' by asking if they have read any of the European authors considered in Croce's *European Literature in the Nineteenth Century*.[68] If they haven't, and it is decidedly MacDiarmid's opinion that they have not, then he asks the question that gives the title to Neill's book, *Is Scotland Educated?* For Scotland cannot be educated if the nation's teachers are ignorant of the European culture that has contributed to the formation of their own civilization and the modernist literature that mirrors the changing nature of the twentieth century:

> I am not even wondering how many teachers, for example, have so much as read James Joyce's *Ulysses* or T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (which, when all that most people know and esteem has vanished as it had never existed, will, almost certainly, survive as the representative expressions of early 20th century life and thought in the English language)[69]

Rather than being inseminators of a life-enhancing general culture teachers block access to cultural understanding and political change through their role as the parasitical interpreting class of capitalism. Teachers are enemies of art because their profession runs counter to the freely creative trajectory of culture by being the chattel of capitalism, in hock to the 'gospel of work':

> The present educational system is part and parcel of the system that propagates this vicious and anti-human Gospel of Work – so much so that it is fair to regard it in the main as a means of prostituting the intellectual and spiritual potentialities of successive generations in a fashion which – for all practical purposes – confines the souls and minds of the population within

[68] *CSS*, p. 403 ('Creative Art and the Scottish Educational System (I)').
[69] Ibid.

> the sordid ruts requisite to the existing economic order and its inherent requirements.[70]

For MacDiarmid, work and education should be a means to greater life and human consciousness, not mere money-grubbing ends in themselves. However, the commercially competitive dictates of capitalism ensure that teachers are only able to educate their pupils for specialized employment, not generally for life. MacDiarmid would say that the 'colourless minds' of most teachers are not capable of anything other than turning out fact gathering, civil servant types such as themselves.[71] If such elitism is common in MacDiarmid's work it leads in this instance to selectivity of a perhaps more surprising kind – his admiration for 'free, private and experimental schools'.[72] But his interest, as always, is with the uncommon, those who are different and dare to be so. MacDiarmid is concerned with 'the development of artists and thinkers', those maladjusted enough to challenge the existent order, a system adapted for and administered by 'Rotarians and robots'.[73] He approves of the experimental school because it takes away the influence of the state-school teacher, 'a mindless and spiritual nonentity', and also largely removes the familial guidance of the couthie Scots parent, another baleful educational influence:

> Scots folk are feared to educate their bairns
> Owre weel in case, ootgrown, they're syne despised,
> And gin they catch them readin' poems, forsooth
> Hale them back to their lessons fast or else
> Gar them rin messages or play fitba' even,
> And abune a' they'd ha'e them be as like
> Themsels as possible – but 'better aff'[74]

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[70] *CSS*, p. 406 ('Creative Art and the Scottish Educational System (II)').
[71] *CSS*, p. 408.
[72] Ibid.; Lewis Grassic Gibbon's son, Daryll Mitchell, attended Neill's Summerhill, while MacDiarmid's son, Michael Grieve, went to John Aitkenhead's Kilquhanity, a school run on similar experimental lines to Neill's.
[73] *CSS*, p. 408.
[74] Ibid.; *CP1*, pp. 226-7 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).

Scottish education does not produce individuals but colonial administrators, 'heids o' depairtments' and other freemasons of mediocrity.[75] As such, it leaves Scotland a place characterized by 'comparative cultural backwardness and creative sterility'.[76] Only an education that is not a system, one that allows individuals to invent themselves, has the potential to free Scotland from its political and cultural provinciality through the creation of artists and thinkers: 'The educational objective should be the polarisation of personalities.'[77] For the self-creation of Scottish individual and nation to be possible, however, the anglified education favoured by capitalist specialization must be replaced by the generalist tradition of a metaphysical Scotland. MacDiarmid's thinking on Scottish education is in keeping with his radical Scottish Republican politics of place in that it seeks to encourage the preservation and continuance of difference. In the face of international capitalist conformity, MacDiarmid seeks provincial places such as Montrose and Whalsay and heretical individuals like A.S. Neill as sparks of creative hope.

The absence of an operational Scottish Republican tradition forces MacDiarmid to theoretically deploy the work of individuals whose political and cultural values he can use in his battle against Anglocentric and capitalist orthodoxy in Scottish education. He promotes the generalism of rebels such as Neill because the poet sees himself as them in a different guise, a radically idealistic troublemaker expelled for disrupting the English class. Yet for all his criticism of the systematic and professionalized nature of a specialized education, MacDiarmid displays a hankering for academic credibility. The compendious notes to *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (1940) – an anthology that is part of MacDiarmid's construction of a Scottish Republican tradition, a selection of poetry 'that cannot be confined to a little Anglo-

[75] *CSS*, p. 409 ('Creative Art and the Scottish Educational System (II)').
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

Scottish margin' (*ergo*: no Edwin Muir) – impressively compiled while living in remote Whalsay, illustrates his wish to be taken seriously as an autodidactic intellectual the equal of any professional academic.[78] Choosing figures to work on, even if as a means to talk about himself, quoting extensively and employing facts as a weapon to bash the sentimental and reactionary subjectivist with in his later poetry of generalist knowledge, all suggest a professorial streak in MacDiarmid. For the brainy boy who didn't go to university and was forced to leave teacher-training college for stealing books, MacDiarmid shows a perhaps understandable inferiority complex towards academics which is regularly aired in boasts about his intellectual concern with 'the exceptional instance, the elusive and out-of-the-way information', a generalist 'capacity for entertaining many heterogeneous interests at one and the same time'.[79] In *Lucky Poet*, MacDiarmid tells us how he 'simply listed scores of his errors of commission and omission' while reviewing Dr. Laurie Magnus's *Dictionary of European Literature*.[80] MacDiarmid goes on to point out that 'at that time I was no University professor' but a journalist working 'in a small Scottish burgh', presumably Montrose.[81]

We could speculate that as he grew older MacDiarmid perhaps became more comfortable with his lack of formal higher education, accustomed to his self-appointed role as the Carlylean poet-prophet with a purported knowledge of all things specifically Scottish and *welt-literatur* in general superior to that of any professor. However, for Walter Perrie, MacDiarmid retained the educational anxieties of a working-class autodidact his whole life:

> Even in old age Grieve was habitually deferential towards academics with little of his intellect and nothing of his creative powers merely because they

[78] MacDiarmid, 'Introduction', *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, selected and edited by Hugh MacDiarmid (London: Macmillan, 1948; 1940), p. vii.
[79] *LP*, pp. 307, 74.
[80] *LP*, p. 13.
[81] *LP*, p. 14.

> represented a world he found esoteric, in which he was never at ease, but which he continued to admire.[82]

MacDiarmid revenges his insecurities by creating a fictional autodidact encapsulating the generalism of the older Scottish metaphysical academic tradition, 'a common workin' man' with 'neist to nae lear', who explores the 'Many-Faced Mystery' that contemporary professional intellectuals in their discipline-bound, specialized academic ruts, overlook:

> Tam was a Scotsman o' a splendid type
> O' which our puir country is near bereft.
> We're a' owre weel-educated noo I doot
> To ha'e ony real knowledge – or love o't – left[83]

Perrie thinks that MacDiarmid's ambiguous attitude to academia, particularly the native intelligentsia, can be traced to the disorienting disjunction between the 'rural, still semi-peasant ethos deeply imbued with presbyterianism' of his Langholm upbringing and his experience and impression of Edinburgh where he went to train as a teacher at Broughton:

> Like many a scion of the working classes, then and since, he must have found the transition painful and disturbing, for the loss of identity involved in the business of gaining an education – all but inevitable for a Scot from a working-class family – cannot be made good by a simple adoption of the values and mores of a new environment.[84]

Perrie states that the 'pattern' of a rural, small-town boy moving to the city to be educated 'was common enough in Scotland' and that 'Grieve displays many of its predictable characteristics'.[85] The phenomenon Perrie describes is, of course, the lad o' pairts. MacDiarmid's progress to Edinburgh was to end in disappointment with his

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[82] Walter Perrie, *Out of Conflict* (Dunfermline: Borderline Press, 1982), p. 16.
[83] *CP1*, pp. 368, 369, 377 ('Tam o' the Wilds and the Many-Faced Mystery').
[84] Perrie, *Out of Conflict*, p. 15.
[85] Ibid., p. 15.

removal from Broughton. However, Bold informs us that according to George Ogilvie, on his arrival in Edinburgh MacDiarmid's appearance and accent were mocked by some of the other students. This may help explain MacDiarmid's anti-metropolitanism – 'I do not like Edinburgh (or any city very much)' – and also the change from 'a Border accent you could have cut with a knife' to the middle-class, non-local educated accent of his adulthood.[86]

MacDiarmid's initial feelings of insecurity on entering Broughton Junior Student Centre to train as a teacher might also throw light on his intense father-son relationship with the English teacher at the school, George Ogilvie. Born in Glasgow in 1871, Ogilvie became the recipient of some of MacDiarmid's most personal letters after establishing a friendship with the fledging writer while teaching him at Broughton. MacDiarmid calls him 'my English master. I never had a Scots master'.[87] We learn from Catherine Kerrigan that Ogilvie had a similar evangelical background to MacDiarmid, and that he also 'had distinct socialist leanings'.[88] MacDiarmid's father died while he was at Broughton, one of the reasons for his departure. In *Lucky Poet*, MacDiarmid says that the abandonment of his teacher training was 'one thing which I have never, for one moment, regretted', imagining teaching to 'be an utterly soul-destroying job'.[89] However, he says of Ogilvie that he 'was a man in ten thousand, who meant a very great deal to me'.[90] For Kerrigan, this goes as far as being 'a replacement for his dead father'.[91] She also agrees with Perrie that 'MacDiarmid's roots were in rural Scotland' and that in Edinburgh 'he was spiritually lost'.[92]

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[86] *LP*, p. 105; George Ogilvie, *Broughton Magazine*, Christmas 1920; quoted in Bold, *MacDiarmid*, p. 43.
[87] *L*, p. 91 (to George Ogilvie, 9 December 1926).
[88] Catherine Kerrigan, ed., *The Hugh MacDiarmid – George Ogilvie Letters* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), p. xvii.
[89] *LP*, p. 228.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Kerrigan, ed., *The Hugh MacDiarmid – George Ogilvie Letters*, p. xvii.
[92] Ibid., p.xxxii.

MacDiarmid's early letters to Ogilvie certainly have the immature, overly earnest, solipsistic tone of a young man still seeking direction. There is a formality of address – Ogilvie always preceded by Mr, even in the later letters – combined with a disingenuous nod to the discrepancy of talent between the professional English teacher and the self-styled autodidactic poetic genius, 'Your Old Pupil'.[93] MacDiarmid writes his early manifestos to Ogilvie, what he hopes to achieve and believes himself to have already accomplished. However, even by his late twenties, as a married working man living in Montrose, MacDiarmid is still looking to Ogilvie for approval.

In an extraordinary letter of 2 November 1920, written from Kildermorie Forest Lodge where he was working as a private tutor, MacDiarmid tells Ogilvie, 'I have loved you above all men and women' and 'sought in season and out of season to justify the faith you expressed in me'.[94] MacDiarmid goes so far as to claim that Ogilvie is the very reason that he writes:

> Do you think I want money or position or reputation? No. Do you think that it matters to my wife, for instance? I may dedicate my poems to her but do you think she reads them? And if she did do you think she would understand them, or me? No! I need not write. I can dream my books and enjoy them in my head. But I try to write incessantly and cannot help doing so because your commendation of my work is my only desire. If my work gives you no pleasure – if my work does not satisfy you that you saw true away back in those Broughton days – it is wasted, irrespective of anything else.[95]

Many young poets have a Muse, but how many entrust this role to their former English teacher? MacDiarmid as Grieve dedicated his early English-language poem from *Annals of the Five Senses*, 'A Moment in Eternity', to Ogilvie and thought highly enough of the poem to include it in *To Circumjack Cencrastus*. As his poetry became more intellectually challenging MacDiarmid turned to another former teacher, Francis George Scott, as his mentor, allowing him to edit *A Drunk Man* and dedicating the

[93] MacDiarmid, *The Hugh MacDiarmid – George Ogilvie Letters*, (9 November 1921), p. 20.
[94] MacDiarmid, *The Hugh MacDiarmid – George Ogilvie Letters*, (2 November 1920), p. 57.
[95] Ibid.

finished poem to him. But it was from Ogilvie that he sought the greatest academic approbation, commenting in a letter of 26 December 1920 that, '"C M Grieve: The Man and His Work" by Geo. Ogilvie will certainly be a book worthy living the most difficult of lives for'.[96] MacDiarmid's desire that his former teacher write an academic book about him would give the poet the ultimate reason to martyr himself in the name of art.

MacDiarmid outlived his dedication to both Ogilvie and F.G. Scott. However, his enthusiasm to secure their commendation, particularly Ogilvie's, illustrates MacDiarmid's paradoxical attitude to education, both at school and university level. MacDiarmid wants the unstinting regard of his former teachers as representatives of the world at large and the educational system in particular. His extensive quoting perhaps signals a similar lack of intellectual confidence in his own autodidactic means of expression which he then submerges under a welter of generalist knowledge, but it may also communicate an extreme regard for an intellectual facility that he believes can be matched with anyone, professional academic or intellectual outsider. By turns we see MacDiarmid seeking intellectual authority in some academics and denying it in others, twisting through the labyrinthian psychological effects of an educational system that scarred, bored, frustrated, sometimes stimulated, but often infuriated him, and which he never accepted and has never quite accepted him. In looking to his former teacher the unrebellious, conventional Ogilvie for poetic praise, MacDiarmid wants acceptance from the local community that the Scots dominie represents and traditionally leads. Yet MacDiarmid's politics of place express a radically internationalist desire to challenge the capitalist values of a specialized educational system, specifically in a Calvinist Scotland provincialized by attachment to English metropolitan norms. Some of MacDiarmid's educational thinking, such as his wish for

[96] MacDiarmid, *The Hugh MacDiarmid – George Ogilvie Letters*, (26 December 1920), p. 68.

Scottish literature and history courses, may have become academic orthodoxy, but the generalism through which his own poetic talent flourished and by means of which he attempts to resurrect a radical republican tradition censored by the Scottish education system remains, like that tradition, largely ignored.

MacDiarmid never worked within the university system as a number of poets and novelists now do. One wonders what it means for the culture if many writers aren't nourished by perspectives found outside their specialized working life in academia, such as fruitfully illustrated by the exceptional creative work produced by MacDiarmid during his decade as a journalist in Montrose. And yet, would MacDiarmid have accepted the hypothetical offer of tenure at a university teaching creative writing instead of virtual intellectual isolation on Whalsay?[97] We can only speculate on what early academic acceptance would have meant for MacDiarmid. However, he admired the work of a man for whom professorship was no block on creativity. MacDiarmid writes in *The Company I've Kept* (1966), thinking also of himself:

> Prophets are proverbially without honour in their own country, but even so the neglect or ignorance of Sir Patrick Geddes in Scotland goes to an uncommon degree and throws a very disconcerting light on our whole national condition[98]

Patrick Geddes is valuable to MacDiarmid because he was a Scottish rebel within the specialized educational establishment, his career illustrative of the generalist approach that exemplifies MacDiarmid's creativeness: 'Geddes "practiced synthesis in an age of

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[97] See Robert Crawford, *The Modern Poet: Poetry, Academia and Knowledge since the 1750s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 205-22 for a poet-professor's analysis of MacDiarmid's autodidactism.

[98] *Company*, p. 79.

specialism", the very practice that has been the theme of all my later poetry and work as a teacher and publicist.'[99]

Geddes was born in 1854 in Ballater and educated at Perth Academy. After a year spent working in a local bank he entered Edinburgh University in 1874, but left after just one week 'repelled by what was expected of him'.[100] Geddes wrote in his diary at this time, 'Have been seeing more clearly that the education I seek is not to be had in a British university. Germany seems to be the promised land'.[101] His initial difficulty in adapting to the realities of Britain's specialized academic framework was to stay with him through a life spent in academe. Geddes never took a degree, 'against diplomas he had an almost insurmountable prejudice', but worked as Professor of Botany at University College Dundee from 1889 to 1914 on a part-time basis, living in Edinburgh and only working in Dundee during the summer.[102] This left him without academic commitments for the rest of the year in which time he could pursue his other concerns, such as developing the Outlook Tower in Edinburgh. According to biographer Philip Mairet:

> this attitude could easily be misinterpreted as one of revolt against academic disciplines, whereas he was really an idealist with an intense love of universities, but a special abhorrence of thought-tight partitions between different departments of intellectual activity.[103]

Geddes believes 'that he may learn best who also learns something about everything'.[104] However, the specialization of academic departments is not conducive

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[99] *Company*, p. 79.
[100] Philip Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology: The Life and Letters of Patrick Geddes* (London: Lund Humphries, 1957), p. 15.
[101] Geddes, quoted in Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology*, pp. 20-1
[102] Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology*, p. 14.
[103] Ibid., p. 41.
[104] Patrick Geddes, *The Masque of Medieval and Modern Learning: A Pageant of Education from Medieval to Modern Times Devised and Interpreted by Patrick Geddes* (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes & Colleagues, The Outlook Tower, 1913), p. 73.

to those like Geddes who accept that 'to know everything about something is a prime duty'.[105]

MacDiarmid agrees with Geddes that 'Each generalisation, each notation, brings a new mastery', writing that only 'Provincially-minded people' believe in the need for the existence of 'water-tight compartments' separating 'the various arts and sciences and departments of practical affairs'.[106] MacDiarmid understands the generalism exemplified by Geddes and himself to be a Scottish trait:

> a like versatility and even a like preponderance of work other than that in connection with which they are most generally known characterises all the other contemporary Scottish writers of any consequence.[107]

It could be that the Scottish Renaissance movement authors that MacDiarmid is alluding to above, such as Edwin and Willa Muir, Lewis Grassic Gibbon and R.B. Cunninghame Graham, involved themselves in the literary equivalent of extra-curricular activity in part because they felt that Scottish universities were not discharging to the full their own cultural responsibilities; Geddes, who 'identified a "Scottish Renaissance" in the 1890s', certainly believed this to be so.[108] In his closing address at University College Dundee in 1890 he describes the once vaunted Scottish university system as being the inferior of English and Continental European models. This he puts down to the lack of an appropriate Scottish historical context in which the universities could find their *raison d'être*. For Geddes, as for MacDiarmid, there have been many great Scottish individuals, but the nation itself has lost its direction, let down by the policy-makers: 'I do not know any politician, whether labelled Conservative or Liberal, Home Ruler or Imperialist, who thinks of our University

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[105] Geddes, *The Masque of Medieval and Modern Learning*, p. 73.
[106] Ibid.; *RT2*, p. 211 ('Behind the Scaffolding: an unusual sidelight on current Scottish Literature').
[107] *RT2*, p. 212.
[108] Christopher Harvie, *Scotland: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 178.

policy as of any political importance at all.'[109] Geddes believed there is a strong civilizational need for a generalist educational structure that encourages the synthesizing of knowledge.

One way in which Geddes attempted to develop this generalist culture was through the Outlook Tower in Edinburgh, which MacDiarmid believed encouraged 'the fullest understanding of the place by its people'.[110] Beginning in 1892, the year of MacDiarmid's birth, the project is in harmony with the poet's politics of place in being 'radically local'.[111] For Murdo MacLeod in his essay 'Patrick Geddes and Scottish Generalism', the Tower was a location where different fields of knowledge could meet with the aim of understanding how they could connect with and improve the local environment, 'a place for thinking about thinking, a place for thinking about the ways we construct our realities, and an information resource that aided that purpose'.[112] The Tower was also 'the world's first sociological laboratory', a place of 'sympathy, synthesis and synergy'.[113] It allowed Geddes to put into practice his theoretical Notation of Life as worked out during his temporary blindness while in Mexico in 1879-80: Place, Work and Folk.[114] The Notation of Life, as its name suggests, has universal significance, but its fundamental application is regional.

Like MacDiarmid, Geddes prioritized the importance of the local, understanding that a thriving regionalism is the propitious correlative to a progressively internationalist nation. In most of his projects, from the University Extension Movement giving access to university education to those in the provinces, to the garden cities campaign, Geddes 'was convinced of the need for decentralization and

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[109] Patrick Geddes, *Scottish University Needs and Aims: Closing Address at University College Dundee*, from the *Scots Magazine*, August 1890 (Perth: Cowan, 1890), p. 5.
[110] *RTI*, p. 131 ('The Outlook Tower').
[111] Murdo MacLeod, 'Patrick Geddes and Scottish Generalism', *The City 'after' Patrick Geddes*, ed. Volker M. Welter and James Lawson (Bern: Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, 2000), p. 62.
[112] MacLeod, 'Patrick Geddes and Scottish Generalism', *The City 'after' Patrick Geddes*, p. 63.
[113] Ibid., pp. 61-2, 65.
[114] See Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology*, p. 33.

for devolution of political control from the great metropolitan centres'.[115] Such devolutionism is illustrated in his cultural activity through the publication with William Sharp, *aka* Fiona McLeod, of *The Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal* for four editions from 1895 to 1897. Echoing the title of Allan Ramsay's 1724 anthology of Scottish poetry, the *Evergreen* was an attempt to fuse the 'traditional revival in Celtic art' with the discoveries 'of popular science'.[116] Despite the retrogressive Celtic Twilight aspect to the publication, MacDiarmid would approve of the aim of synthesizing the artistic and scientific in a local setting.[117] The kind of generalist poetry he wants is

> a cultural synthesis
> Of thought, action, belief, and education which covers most
> Of the important gradations of thought and human learning[118]

Much of MacDiarmid's later poetry displays this synthesizing tendency, but the poem that is closest in spirit to the generalism of Geddes is *In Memoriam James Joyce*. This seeks the fusion of different cultures and ideas: the materialism of the West and the philosophy of the East (Geddes was friends with the Indian nationalist and poet Rabindranath Tagore); the potential global civilizational progress made possible by empirical science and the nationalist political resistance of a postcolonial art; the specifics of difference implicit in local cultures and languages with the imperial grand design of a world literature. It is a poem asserting the civilizational need for a generalist culture in an age of specialized technology and education, an investigation of the limits of knowledge by a modernist renaissance man. MacDiarmid's 'personal vision' in *In Memoriam James Joyce* is of 'The point where science and art can

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[115] Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology*, p. 139.
[116] MacLeod, 'Patrick Geddes and Scottish Generalism'. *The City 'after' Patrick Geddes*, p. 65.
[117] See Kenneth Buthlay, *Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve)*, Scottish Writers Series, series ed. David Daiches (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982), p. 13 for MacDiarmid's response in the first *Scottish Chapbook* (summer 1922) to Geddes's *Evergreen* and the idea of a 'Scots Renascence'.
[118] *CP1*, p. 612 ('Further Passages from "The Kind of Poetry I Want"').

meet'.[119] This autodidact understands that there is vision and scholarship, the poetic and the factual, and *In Memoriam James Joyce* is their attempted synthesis:

> For there are two kinds of knowledge,
> Knowing about things and knowing things,
> Scientific data and aesthetic realisation,
> And I seek their perfect fusion in my work.[120]

With *In Memoriam James Joyce* MacDiarmid strives 'to heal the breach / Between genius and scholarship, literature and learning' in a specialized capitalist culture and in his dualistic self.[121] Perhaps rationalizing for the loss of lyrical talent in his later work, the marxist MacDiarmid becomes the professor-poet, keen to indicate the civilizational benefits of generalist knowledge:

> That the world, which holds out both hands to genius,
> Is unhappy in the presence of scholarship
> Often contemptuous, sometimes even resentful,
> Siding naturally with the spiritual valour
> Which dashes itself to pieces
> On the unbreachable walls which fence Truth,
> But having little sympathy
> With the slow and cautious movement of learning.
> Yet we all know now the world might get on better
> If it ceased to produce great men of action;
> Speculative genius is a mixed boon too.[122]

It may be hard to believe in MacDiarmid disapproving of 'speculative genius' and 'great men of action', some of the qualities that he previously desired in a metaphysical Scot, but *In Memoriam James Joyce* moves us towards the postmodern linguistic dexterity that focuses primarily on 'Words, words, words!'.[123] Like the polymathic, interdisciplinary Geddes – town-planner, sociologist, biologist, educationalist: 'one of the last great Scottish Faustian generalists' – the autodidact

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[119] *CP2*, p. 782 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[120] Ibid.
[121] *CP2*, p. 752.
[122] Ibid.
[123] *CP2*, p. 768.

MacDiarmid of *In Memoriam James Joyce* clearly enjoys 'Wandering from subject to subject', even if sometimes at the cost of pedantry.[124]

Murdo MacLeod claims that Geddes was 'a generalist born into a culture in which generalism was taken for granted as an educational goal'.[125] However, if the latter half of this proposition were true it is difficult to understand why Geddes was repeatedly turned down for academic posts at Scottish universities, even with referees such as Darwin and Huxley.[126] By the time MacDiarmid published *In Memoriam James Joyce* in 1955 the Scottish educational system had almost certainly turned its back on its traditional generalist approach in favour of the specialization countenanced by the capitalist division of labour and the English universities. It is the goal of *In Memoriam James Joyce* to reassert the importance of Scottish generalism in the face of

> All the commercial considerations, the moral greasinesses,
> The Professors of Literature, *Forschungen*, university curricula,
> Honours examinations, all these phenomena commercial at base
> Which stand in the way of the taste for
> And honouring of literature[127]

MacDiarmid opposes what Tom Leonard calls 'the essentially acquisitive attitude to culture' of the university system, itself 'merely the forced flower of the educational dungheap [*sic*] from which it sprouts', because it produces careerist, class-bound people in accordance with the conformist dictates of capital.[128] Historical and cultural 'Material contrary to the official assumptions', such as the local poetry collected in Leonard's selection *Radical Renfrew* (1990), 'has been – and still is –

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[124] Tom Hubbard, *The Integrative Vision: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Baudelaire, Rilke and MacDiarmid* (Kirkcaldy: Akros, 1997), p. 50; *CP2*, p. 797 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[125] MacLeod, 'Patrick Geddes and Scottish Generalism', *The City 'after' Patrick Geddes*, p. 56.
[126] See Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology*, p. 40.
[127] *CP2*, p. 870 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[128] Tom Leonard, 'The Proof of the Mince Pie', *Intimate Voices: Selected Work 1965-1983* (London: Vintage, 1995; 1984), pp. 65, 67.

carefully concealed'.[129] As Leonard explains, a canon is a literary '*code* embodying desirable social, moral and political values' that excludes those who are not educated to understand, or whose lives do not embody the principles of, that code.[130] If culture has a purpose other than the reproduction of itself, for MacDiarmid it should be the disinterested increase of understanding, an extension of the limits of human consciousness, and the encouragement of difference:

> We must put all our reliance in the intellect
> And develop it in everybody;
> The demand for intellectual leadership to-day
> Far exceeds the supply.
> Variation must be encouraged
> Rather than suppressed.[131]

For the aims of MacDiarmid's synthetic 'poetry of facts' to be accomplished the specialized education system of capitalism must give way to the Scottish tradition of generalism at the core of the democratic intellect.[132]

The democratic intellect has entered Scottish educational mythology. Made famous by George Elder Davie's book of that name in 1961, the phrase was coined in 1932 by 'leftish Unionist' Walter Elliot, Secretary of State for Scotland 1936-8.[133] (MacDiarmid wrote with characteristic directness that Elliot should be buried 'In a Neglected Graveyard', 'In his right place at last, / Making up for his past'.)[134] Davie's book is an attempt to recover the sense of 'diversity in what may be called social ethics' that was purportedly part of Scotland's loss of independent political statehood.[135] In education, this meant a system that had an understanding of the

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[129] *Company*, p. 138.
[130] Tom Leonard, ed., 'Introduction', *Radical Renfrew: Poetry from The French Revolution to The First World War by poets born, or sometime resident in, the County of Renfrewshire* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), p. xviii.
[131] *CP2*, p. 838 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[132] *CP1*, p. 630 ('Poetry and Science').
[133] Harvie, *Scotland: A Short History*, p. 188.
[134] *CP1*, p. 462 ('In a Neglected Graveyard').
[135] Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, p. xi.

'inherited ideal of a culture in which the general should take precedence over the particular and the whole over the parts'.[136] For Davie, the university reforms of the nineteenth century undermined the generalist Scottish tradition of education by introducing the specialization characteristic of the English system. The progress of anglification that Davie traces in *The Democratic Intellect* is facilitated by the demotion of philosophy in the educational process. The significance of the philosophical approach to education, the questioning from first principles, brought fame to the Presbyterian educational principles of 'Metaphysical Scotland':

> As is testified both by text-books and accounts of the spirit of the teaching, it was usual in Scotland, in teaching mathematics and science, language and literature, to give an unusually large amount of attention to the first principles and metaphysical ground of the disciplines.[137]

By prioritizing philosophical thinking throughout the university curriculum the students gained a broad humanist education that enabled them to think for themselves in various different directions. A generalist education may not have offered the depth of the narrow specialization of the English model, but this specialization for employment should only follow after a general preparation for life.

For MacDiarmid, 'It is the ability not to think of one thing alone for a long time, but of one thing in relation to many others' that characterizes the Scottish generalist tradition of philosophical education and gives it its worth.[138] According to Davie, undermining the generalist tradition by abandoning the philosophical basis on which the teaching of Scottish students rests is a means by which 'to prepare the way for the cultural subordination of Scotland to England parallel to its political subordination'.[139] This is effected by politically dissolving the cultural differences that exist in the area

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[136] Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, p. 4.
[137] Ibid., p.13.
[138] *Company*, p. 253.
[139] Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, p. 58.

of 'social ethics', or civil society. In so doing, the future elite produced by the Scottish university will bear a remarkable similarity to their English counterparts. Scotland would no longer have an elite or national intelligentsia with any understanding of its distinctive traditions. This facilitates cultural and political rule by a unified British elite. The policy of subverting the philosophical practice of thinking from first principles results in the weakening of the nation's *ur-motives* and therefore the possibility of nationalism. The opposition to thinking from first principles implicit in the empiricism of the specializing procedure indicates the loss of the nation's generalist educational traditions and the imposition of those of a foreign power in line with colonialism. MacDiarmid understands that the long-term acceptance of such a position would be sufficient to eradicate the national culture:

> *Oor four Universities*
> *Are Scots but in name;*
> *They wadna be here*
> *If ither folk did the same*
> *– Paid heed tae a' lear*
> *Exceptin' their ain,*
> *For they'd cancel oot syne*
> *And leave us wi' nane.*[140]

If Scotland cannot find the political will to develop an educational policy that prioritizes its own national culture then that culture will disappear, leaving its universities as bulwarks of imperialism and extensions of the English public school.

MacDiarmid despairs of Scotland as a place that has 'a general determination to dispense with all the national roots', believing there to be 'a widespread spite against the idea of having (save as something appertaining to the remote past) any national culture'.[141] For MacDiarmid, the abandonment of a generalist university education is one way of undermining the national culture and the possibility of an autonomous

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[140] *CP1*, p. 203 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[141] *LP*, p. 84.

politics of place. One of the tasks of the Scottish Renaissance is to ensure against 'a subtle changing of our national psychology' through educational anglification.[142] Scottish educationalists should understand that 'Scottish children ought to be put into full possession of the national heritage'.[143] Only a Scottish education that allows a distinctive Scottish accent to be heard will enable these aims to be fulfilled. This entails a radical reorientation in the teaching of Scottish history. Like Scottish education generally, the teaching of Scottish history has been 'inadequate to the conception of "Scotland – a Nation"'.[144] MacDiarmid contended in 1925 that Scottish history as a subject of research and teaching is as 'provincial' as other areas of Scottish life, 'lagging far behind contemporary European scholarship'.[145] What is needed is an understanding that there is a notable history of Scottish history, a tradition that scholars can draw on, follow and surpass. The present anglicized condition of Scottish education should not give us 'the idea that history in Scotland was a negligible thing before the advent of English professors in our midst about the end of the nineteenth century'.[146] Thirty-six years before Davie's *The Democratic Intellect* (1961) appeared telling of the changes in direction in Scotland's universities in the nineteenth century due to the Anglo-driven assault on the generalist tradition of a metaphysical Scotland, the autodidact MacDiarmid shows his own knowledge of the history of Scottish education.

In *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect* (1986), Davie continues his examination of the dispute between the generalist and specializing camps. He cites the debate over the direction of Scottish education that split the Scottish Education Department and the Scottish universities as being similar in importance to 'the

[142] *RT2*, p. 371 ('Scotland and Europe').
[143] *RT3*, p. 401 ('Scots and the Schools').
[144] *CSS*, p. 220 ('The New Movement in Scottish Historiography: George Pratt Insh').
[145] Ibid.
[146] *CSS*, p. 222.

Church-State crisis of 1833-1843' that issued in the Disruption.[147] The 'frenzied decade (1917-1927)' during which this educational controversy took place coincides with MacDiarmid finding the linguistic vehicle for the writing of his Scots poetry and the corresponding inception of his campaign against the anglification of Scottish culture and politics mounted from provincial Montrose.[148] For Davie, this is not without importance as it sets MacDiarmid's poetry, particularly the search for a metaphysical Scot of *A Drunk Man*, in the context of the collapse of the traditional Scottish education system. Davie positions the Montrose MacDiarmid of the twenties with the classicists and generalists of the traditional metaphysical Scotland that was being usurped by the specializing doctrines of the educational modernists.

Davie sees 'one of the main themes' of *A Drunk Man* as being 'the contemporary breakdown of the symbiosis between democracy and intellect which had been traditional among the Scots'.[149] This is also a strong motif of modernist poems such as *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos* from authors who lack a direct Scottish background or influence. However, while understanding that a keynote of *A Drunk Man* is that it centres on 'an autodidact whose culture is alienating him from his family and fellow-townspeople with their orthodox anti-elitist point of view', Davie differentiates MacDiarmid's poetic offering from much of the metropolitan politics of modernism by emphasizing 'that the drunk man is still able to identify himself with the anti-elitist point of view and to see himself through the eyes of others'.[150]

Scottish poetry's most famous anti-elitist poetic confirmation 'that self-consciousness', as Davie says of *A Drunk Man*, 'is inseparable from mutual consciousness' is Burns's 'To a Louse':

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[147] George Elder Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect: The Problem of Generalism and Specialisation in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), p. i.
[148] Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect*, p. ii.
[149] Ibid., p. 129.
[150] Ibid.

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To *see oursels as ithers see us*!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion:
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
An' ev'n Devotion![151]

Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg remind us that Burns's poem demonstrates 'Adam Smith's concept of the creation of internalised spectator in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* [acting] as a form of secular conscience'.[152] Citing the importance of Smith's book to Burns MacDiarmid says, 'The Burnsian philosophy of life is in fact nothing but a poeticized version of the Scots philosophy of his time.'[153] Davie identifies Adam Smith, along with Hegel and Schelling, as philosophical progenitors of *A Drunk Man*. Davie says that MacDiarmid read Henry Laurie's *Scottish Philosophy in its National Development* (1902).[154] As Davie points out in *The Crisis*, MacDiarmid, particularly circa his Montrose period, displays a tenacious ability to think philosophical problems through from first principles. The poet believes this to be a factor central to metaphysical Scotland's generalist educational tradition that is now 'discouraged by the Philosophy Professors of our universities'.[155] MacDiarmid quotes Laurie's observation that 'the aesthetic theories' of Scottish philosophers endorse 'a psychological method of inquiry'.[156] According to Laurie, the Scots philosophers were unwilling to separate 'the methods of introspection and observation' that distinguish the 'questions of facts which belong to psychology' from 'philosophical questions relating to first principles of knowledge and of being'.[157] This merging of the

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[151] Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect*, p. 136; Burns, 'To a Louse', *The Canongate Burns: The Complete Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p. 132.
[152] Noble and Hogg, *The Canongate Burns*, p. 133.
[153] *LP*, p. 386.
[154] In conversation with the present author, Edinburgh, 27 October 2000.
[155] *A*, p. 102 ('Aesthetics in Scotland').
[156] Ibid.
[157] Henry Laurie, *Scottish Philosophy in its National Development* (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1902), p. 6.

psychological with the philosophical, a concern with the world within and the way this inner landscape is shaped by our cosmological view of the universe, forms the thematic essence of MacDiarmid's early lyrics in Scots, linking him with Burns and the generalism of a Scottish philosophical tradition that fuses the universal and the particular.

The neglected collection *The Lucky Bag*, published in 1927 – the year in which according to Davie philosophy once again found a central role in the Scottish universities – illustrates the symbiosis of psychology and philosophy in MacDiarmid's poetic thought. The universal and particular unite in the mind of an individual in contemplation of self, nature and the stars:

> I saw my brain as the sun micht see
> A dandelion ba'
> And think it was its ain
> Pale image that it saw.
>
> I saw my brain as the sun micht see
> A dandelion ba'
> – And noo like a starry sky
> My thochts owre a'thing blaw.[158]

It is fitting that MacDiarmid should have sought to revive the national culture by conceiving of a metaphysical panorama in a Scots voice. The understanding of the self that is displayed in the Scots poetry – that the individual, once self-realized as the metaphysical Scot, is an important part of the whole – informs MacDiarmid's politics of place in which the universal *is* the particular, however marginal that particular may appear to be. This perception of the essential interconnectedness of things – the understanding, as Alasdair MacIntyre puts it, that 'the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity' – is the legacy of a generalist educational tradition hidden by an anglified political schema

[158] *CP1*, p. 178 ('Dandelion').

conducive to capital, but unearthed in MacDiarmid's radical reformation of self and nation.[159]

R.D. Anderson criticizes Davie's account of Scottish university education as being 'strongly idealist [...] and somewhat ahistorical'.[160] MacDiarmid is in strong agreement with Davie's nationalist line but while Anderson's objections to Davie as a historian of education may have some weight, for the poet envisaging a radically self-determining Scottish future such censure could be interpreted as praise. As we shall see, MacDiarmid was aware of what Anderson calls the 'social context' to the educational debate, hence his interest in the work of John Maclean.[161] In this respect, despite the efforts of Andrew Lockhart Walker in *The Revival of the Democratic Intellect* (1994) to defend the social tenets of the democratic intellect from Anderson's attack, Davie's *Crisis* is perhaps more revealing.[162]

Based on the premise that the metaphysical tradition in Scottish education entails 'a pessimistic estimate of the human situation', Davie believes MacDiarmid's Scots poetry before 1930 to be illustrative of 'the doctrine of original sin' inherent in the concept of nationality.[163] This is in keeping with the thought of a modernist such as T.S. Eliot who believed 'human kind / Cannot bear very much reality' but, according to Davie, in opposition to the perfectibilism of social radicals and educational modernists with their 'dream of a transcendence of nationality'.[164] Davie contends that MacDiarmid's later materialist poetry of generalist knowledge begun in Whalsay, with its combination of science and marxism, descends into quackery. In a chapter entitled 'Kemp Smith and the Metaphysics of Original Sin', Davie cites with approval 'Kemp

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[159] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1996; 1981), p. 221.
[160] Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland*, p. 25.
[161] Ibid.
[162] See Andrew Lockhart Walker, *The Revival of the Democratic Intellect: Scotland's University Traditions and the Crisis in Modern Thought* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1994), pp. 176-8.
[163] Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect*, p. vi.
[164] T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974; 1963), p. 190; Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect*, p. vi.

Smith's resourcefulness and boldness in his efforts to stem the encroaching tide of Marxism' in Scotland just after the First World War.[165] This was a period in which according to Andrew Marr, 'Scotland seemed to some people to be lurching towards revolution' with English troops sent to Glasgow to quell possible unrest and tanks and guns in the city's George Square.[166] At this time of social disorder, Norman Kemp Smith conducted lectures for the reformist Workers' Educational Association that sought to contain 'the Marxist threat' by 'getting the working men to take their social education from professors rather than agitators' such as John Maclean and his revolutionary Scottish Labour College.[167]

While Maclean was teaching the importance of economics to an under-educated working class, Kemp Smith was worrying over 'the tendency of the twentieth century to be far too optimistic about the possibilities of human achievement' and preferred to lecture on 'Traditional Views of Human Nature'.[168] According to Davie, Kemp Smith believed that a secular, materialist ideology like socialism should be rooted in a metaphysical, religious doctrine such as Calvinism in order to prevent unrealistic expectations of its potential to effect change. Clearly the marxist MacDiarmid of *Lucky Poet* would disagree with Davie and Kemp Smith. However, the efforts of the metaphysical poet of *A Drunk Man* to free himself from the creative cultural confines of a Calvinist education, combined with the international socialist working from Montrose to reverse the political provincialization of Scotland, also casts doubt on the practical influence of Kemp Smith's pessimistic philosophy on the MacDiarmid of the 1920s.

The metaphysical Scot of *A Drunk Man* searches for greater personal consciousness and national vision, no longer fettered by the 'stranglin' rictus' of

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[165] Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect*, p. 51.
[166] Andrew Marr, *The Battle for Scotland* (London: Penguin, 1995; 1992), p. 57.
[167] Davie, *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect*, p. 51.
[168] Ibid., p. 52.

Calvinism, an ethos that reduces 'a people's genius' to the production of 'a minister or twa!'.[169] It is in the nature of a Calvinist education to equalize individuals spiritually, while being less concerned to address the causes of the economic inequalities of Scottish society. Davie's democratic intellect, understood as an abstract concept rather than a historical analysis of Scotland's university system, is a philosopher's attempt to reinstate his subject to its former predominant place in the Scottish university programme. By prioritizing the teaching of philosophy, by philosophically generalizing each university discipline, a democracy of the intellect will reign in which subject is connected to subject and the premises of all are questioned from first principles. As the title of Davie's book implies, the idea of democracy applies specifically to the intellect, the way the mind of the student is taught to function in a generalist rather than a specialized way. It has no necessary connection to economic society unless such a link is forged politically through the symbiosis of Scottish nationalism and international communism that MacDiarmid's John Maclean-inspired radical Scottish Republican politics of place espouses.

Maclean understood that the 'democratic' Calvinist education of Scottish schools and universities is in fact a training in the good citizenry required by capitalism. If the democratic myth is actually about the production of a national bourgeois elite, with the occasional token lad or lass o' pairts recruited to this class for ameliorative purposes, then the working class must develop an educational process of their own to enable them to understand and challenge their subservient economic position. Maclean was born in Pollokshaws in 1879 of parents who had been cleared from the Highlands as children. MacDiarmid wrote of Maclean that 'The unification of Scotland – Highland and Lowland, rural and urban – was complete in himself'.[170]

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[169] *CP1*, pp. 124, 125 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[170] *Company*, p. 147.

There is some wish fulfilment here as Grieve-MacDiarmid – Presbyterian Scottish Borderer and pseudo-Gaelic Highland bard, Scottish nationalist and international communist – is longing to make a fissured Scotland whole. Maclean's politics, however, speak more of the class divisions of Scotland than national unity. Transferred from his first teaching post for refusing to teach Christian doctrines, Maclean was finally rejected by his chosen profession in 1915, sacked for advocating pacifism to the workers during the War: 'I have been in the Socialist Army for fifteen years, the only army worth fighting for. God damn all other armies.'[171]

Such radicalism could only be endearing to the marxist MacDiarmid's rebel nationalist heart. Serving during the First World War as a non-combatant, MacDiarmid was in barracks in Sheffield during the Easter Rising – 24 to 29 April 1916 – and claims that 'If it had been possible at all I would have deserted at that time from the British Army and joined the Irish'.[172] Like Maclean, MacDiarmid believed that national self-determination and international socialism are inseparable imperatives of revolutionary progress, each man inspired by the Edinburgh-born revolutionary James Connolly and his leading role in the Irish Rebellion of 1916. Maclean and MacDiarmid had been present in South Wales during the miners' strike and general militancy of 1911, the revolutionary politician spreading the socialist message, the poet reporting for the Monmouthshire *Labour News*, which 'was set up in 1907 by the Miners Federation'.[173]

In Maclean, MacDiarmid found the most notable modern representative of a Red Scotland tradition that would fuse nationalism and communism, the local and universal. MacDiarmid relates Scottish Republicanism to 'our hidden Gaelic traditions', 'hidden' by the Unionist historiography of Scottish academia and also the

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[171] Maclean, quoted in Nan Milton, *John Maclean* (Bristol: Pluto Press, 1973), p. 100.
[172] MacDiarmid, *The Thistle Rises: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose by Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Alan Bold (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), p. 289.
[173] Kerrigan, ed., *The Hugh MacDiarmid – George Ogilvie Letters*, p. 6.

personal slander of mental instability directed against its most influentially radical proponents.[174] According to MacDiarmid, anticipating the black arts of postmodern party political spin, such calumniatory tactics are 'no new expedient in politics', particularly with regard to Scottish Republicanism:

> Thomas Muir and Fletcher of Saltoun have similarly had doubts cast on their mental soundness, and one of the intentions in resorting to this infamous expedient in respect of Maclean was, undoubtedly, an anxiety to represent his advocacy of Workers' Republicanism as a new and unheralded departure and hide the fact that, on the contrary, Maclean came at the end of a long sequence of Scottish Radical and Republican thinkers.[175]

If the specialized Scottish education system of capitalism obfuscates the tradition of radical republicanism then the only way to ensure that the tenets of the creed come to light is through the organization of an oppositional, generalist educational process.

With the success of his classes on Economics and Industrial History in Glasgow from 1906 to the Rent Strike of 1915 acting as inspiration, Maclean founded the Scottish Labour College in 1916. Arrested just prior to the organizing conference, Maclean was convinced that 'he had been singled out for special punishment by the government, that the greatest "crime" that he had committed in their eyes was the teaching of Marxian economics to the Scottish workers'.[176] Maclean believes that the main task of the Scottish Labour College is the teaching of economics 'from the labour standpoint. Otherwise we ought to send our students to the capitalist universities'.[177] Like MacDiarmid, Maclean is opposed to an educational system that 'simply has for its object the creation of intelligent workers', being instead 'interested in such education as will make revolutionists'.[178]

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[174] *Company*, pp. 139-40.
[175] Ibid., p. 139.
[176] Milton, *John Maclean*, p. 118.
[177] John Maclean, *In the Rapids of Revolution: Essays, Articles and Letters 1902-23*, ed., intro., and commentaries Nan Milton (London: Allison & Busby, 1978), p. 118.
[178] Maclean, *In the Rapids of Revolution*, p. 123.

Although he was never imprisoned like Maclean, MacDiarmid liked to believe that he was persecuted in similar fashion. He explains his exile on Whalsay as an inability to gain employment in bourgeois Scotland because of his revolutionary politics of place:

> the Class War is as intense in Scotland as anywhere else; even if one does not run as much risk of prison and torture and beating-up and death, one can be – as I have been – sentenced to virtual death, denied the means of livelihood, systematically vilified, have one's private life invaded and poisoned in the most appalling fashion, and have to suffer all this without anything like the opportunities available elsewhere of getting one's own back – of the relief of real action[179]

Unable in the relative political stability of Scotland to get his own back through the 'real action' of revolutionary violence, MacDiarmid vents his social spleen through the writing of *Lucky Poet*. MacDiarmid believed that the publication of 'Red Scotland', which was written while in Shetland and should have appeared in 1936, was blocked due to its politically incendiary contents. His thinking at this period is heavily influenced by Maclean, whose biography he was attempting to write but which, like 'Red Scotland', would never see publication. According to Alan Bold, Routledge chose not to publish 'Red Scotland' because it was deemed uncommercial, anti-royal, and 'more than half the book comprised quotations'.[180] These points are certainly true, but they would not be viewed as faults by an autodidactic MacDiarmid in search of generalist knowledge through which to substantiate his uncovering of a radical republican tradition in Scottish politics.

The typescript of 'Red Scotland' that exists in the National Library of Scotland indicates a book written at high pace and displaying MacDiarmid's usual weakness of narrative structure. However, despite its faults, 'Red Scotland' had the potential to be a

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[179] *LP*, p. 98.
[180] Bold, *MacDiarmid*, p. 339.

powerful book, one that argues for a tradition of radical Scottish Republicanism that makes sense of the apparent contradictions in MacDiarmid's politics of place. Inspired by John Maclean's 1920 declaration for a Scottish Workers' Republic in which the 'communism of the clans must be re-established on a modern basis', MacDiarmid's Celtic communism breaks completely with the bourgeois nationalism of the Scottish Renaissance movement while still seeking to find a nationalist setting for an internationalist radicalism.[181]

MacDiarmid believes that 'The Communist Party is right in regarding the official National Party of Scotland as a Fascist organisation'.[182] It is the 'bourgeois propaganda' that is 'romantic Nationalism' – a form of political 'trickery by which the workers are rendered well-nigh incapable of seeing their real interests' – that obscures the true nationalism that is radical Scottish Republicanism.[183] MacDiarmid confirms Maclean's anti-imperialism when the poet writes that 'the secession of Scotland will be one of the deadliest blows that can be struck at English Imperialism – a blow at the very heart of Empire'.[184] Maclean believed that Scotland was closer to the realization of socialism than England and that an independent Scotland would not only free Scotland from English rule but begin the revolutionary process of releasing both nations from capitalism. Both Maclean and MacDiarmid adhere to the Leninist position, expounded in the Russian's *Thesis on the National and Colonial Question* and repeated by MacDiarmid in *Lucky Poet*, that '*No nation that enslaves another can itself be free*'.[185]

Scotland should be independent not only because of its historical national status but through its modern industrial importance. For MacDiarmid, 'there is no question

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[181] Maclean, *In the Rapids of Revolution*, p. 218.
[182] MacDiarmid, 'Red Scotland', [1936], corrected typescript in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, NLS MS27035, p. 31.
[183] MacDiarmid, 'Red Scotland', p. 259.
[184] Ibid., p. 239.
[185] *LP*, p. 169.

of the proletarian significance of Glasgow'.[186] An independent Scotland would not become a small reactionary state, a bulwark of capitalism and bourgeois culture, but a bastion of socialism and scientific progress because of the massively important weight of west-coast Scotland's potentially revolutionary industrial working class. *Their* nationalism would be progressive and internationalist in orientation, not aristocratic like Polish nationalism or imbued with the philistinism of the Scottish National Party. With a final castigatory glance back at his former nationalist colleagues and his own search in Montrose for the metaphysical Scot, MacDiarmid in Whalsay enters the battle for a radical Scottish Republic with new comrades:

> Communism means death to the national cultures in so far as those elements in existing national cultures are concerned which 'embrace all classes', are rooted in the past, or founded on alleged transcendental values. It will be found that the Scottish Nationalist elements I represent are not alien to Communism to the slightest degree in any of these respects.[187]

If the Scottish nationalism that MacDiarmid does not represent is bourgeois and reactionary, then the Scottish radicals that he wants to approve of must ensure that they are not under 'this collective hypnosis of the Scottish people' in their adherence to English nationalism disguising itself as British internationalism.[188] The powerful spell of this ideology, fostered through a specialized Scottish educational system that has been deprived of its national roots, has 'advantages to our Capitalist society' in obscuring the distinct economic needs and concerns of the working class in Scotland.[189] The MacDiarmid of 'Red Scotland' agrees with Maclean when the latter writes that 'Scotland, however, can only have real independence for all her inhabitants under communism controlled and evolved by workers' committees'.[190]

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[186] MacDiarmid, 'Red Scotland', p. 240.
[187] Ibid., p. 247.
[188] Ibid., p. 221.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Maclean, *In the Rapids of Revolution*, p. 219.

Frustrated by the metropolitan centralism of the CPGB and the 'corruption of the London communists', from 1920 Maclean attempted to establish a Scottish Communist Party 'as a prelude to a Scottish Communist Republic'.[191] Maclean's failure to construct a radical party within a distinctly Scottish national context was hindered by the questioning of his mental health by fellow Scottish communists, such as Willie Gallacher and Harry MacShane. However, if MacDiarmid found intellectual sustenance in Maclean's Scottish Republicanism during his own breakdown on Whalsay in the 1930s, then Maclean's politics have been kept alive in large part through MacDiarmid's cultural influence. Perhaps Maclean's radical idealism has appealed more to poets than politicians. For instance, *Homage to John Maclean* (1973) is a literary tribute by poets of the second wave of the Scottish movement inspired by Maclean, but mostly galvanized by MacDiarmid's tributes.[192]

B.J. Ripley and J. McHugh suggest that biographical work on Maclean in the 1970s by Nan Milton and John Broom was also prompted by MacDiarmid's influence, in particular that 'they both place Maclean firmly in the nationalist camp'.[193] In this respect, Ripley and McHugh claim that 'getting Maclean totally wrong can be left to Hugh McDiarmid [*sic*]'.[194] They understand Maclean's nationalism to be a strategic subsidiary to the striving for international revolution: 'He was, as he always insisted, first, last and always an Internationalist and cannot be properly understood except in that context.'[195] However, as with most of MacDiarmid's political denigrators, this completely fails to comprehend the symbiotic relationship between nationalism and internationalism that is also important to any understanding of Maclean's radical Scottish Republicanism. Ripley and McHugh claim that 'what is distinctive about

[191] Maclean, *In the Rapids of Revolution*, p. 220.
[192] T.S Law & Thurso Berwick, ed., *Homage to John Maclean* (Larkhall: John Maclean Society, 1973).
[193] B.J. Ripley and J. McHugh, *John MacLean* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 6.
[194] Ripley and McHugh, *John MacLean*, p. 168.
[195] Ibid.

Maclean is not his "Scottishness" but the "non-Britishness" of his approach to political questions'.[196] Given Maclean's nationalism, and the generalism of his workers' educational courses, this statement is almost tautological in its absurdity. Maclean's 'non-Britishness' is precisely the hidden tradition of radical Scottish Republicanism that MacDiarmid's politics of place seeks to bring to light: a fusion of the international and the national, the socialist and the Scottish nationalist, the red and the black.

It is impossible to detach the politics of MacDiarmid and Maclean from the Scottish background and education that formed them, despite the attempts of those such as Ripley and McHugh to suggest that Scottishness is some sort of rogue element, a problematically provincial component that should be jettisoned from the internationally metropolitan equation. According to Maclean's daughter Nan Milton, a Scottish Presbyterian education was crucial to the formation of her father's politics:

> His own personal interpretation of Marxism was obviously, whether he realized it himself or not, affected by the general ethos of the Presbyterian Church. Its ultra-democratic form of Church government, and its passionate belief in universal education – both stemming directly from John Knox and the social revolutionaries of the seventeenth century – found a reflection in his emphasis on 'power from below upwards' and on the supreme importance of independent working-class education.[197]

MacDiarmid was similarly influenced by his Scottish education, even if he was moved to repudiate the religion that he felt shackled his creativity and provincialized the nation. Despite MacDiarmid's support for Maclean's anti-university, revolutionary educational policy, the philosophical generalism that George Davie argues characterizes the academic tradition of a metaphysical Scotland not only influences the poet's pre-1930 cosmological Scots poetry as Davie contends, but also his later marxian English-language poetry of generalist knowledge. Both of MacDiarmid's great periods – the 1920s in metaphysical Montrose and the thirties in Whalsay, where

[196] Ripley and McHugh, *John MacLean*, p. 174.
[197] Milton, *John Maclean*, p. 23.

he uncovers John Maclean's radical Scottish Republicanism – display the same generalist desire to see life in the whole, if from different perspectives, and the need to synthesize knowledge and connect poetry as fruitfully as possible to a politics derived from the traditions of a specific place:

> Poetry of such integration as cannot be effected
> Until a new and conscious organisation of society
> Generates a new view
> Of the world as a whole
> As the integration of all the rich parts
> Uncovered by the separate disciplines.
> That is the poetry that I want.[198]

The engagement with Scottish place and its traditions that is central to MacDiarmid's evolving political ideology is crucial to an understanding of his thinking on Scottish education. It is this sometimes fractious interplay between place and ideology that shapes MacDiarmid's politics. This chapter has argued that his radical Scottish Republicanism owes much to the generalist determination to question from first principles the intellectual and academic specialists who administer capitalism and imperialism. The autodidact MacDiarmid aims to develop a self-determining Scottish politics of place informed by the philosophical generalism of a metaphysical Scotland. The poetry he wants is also an undertaking to uncover a tradition hidden by an Anglo-Scottish capitalist education that 'may tell our young people about Sir Walter Scott and Buchan and Barrie and other "safe cards"' but fails to inform 'them of the significance of men such as John Maclean'.[199]

In his Foreword to P. Berresford Ellis and Seumas Mac a' Ghobhainn's *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820* (1970), MacDiarmid protests that due to the political bias of the Scottish 'educational system scarcely anything of value in relation to our

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[198] *CP2*, p. 1025 ('The Kind of Poetry I Want').
[199] MacDiarmid, 'Red Scotland', p. 106.

literature, history, national biography, or economic facts gets through the filter'.[200] This is particularly true of 'Scottish Radical and Republican thinkers' such as the executed radicals of 1820, James Wilson, Andrew Hardie and John Baird, and the teacher John Maclean M.A.:

> I bracket with Maclean's name not only the names of the pioneers and martyrs with whom this book deals but the names of John Murdoch (the crofters' leaders – Maclean's agrarian counterpart), and John Swinton (who aided the Negroes in South Carolina before the Civil War, became a friend of Walt Whitman and knew Karl Marx) as examples of Scots who are far too little known – and yet in my opinion, of more consequence than most of those who figure prominently either in our history books or in contemporary life.[201]

Such censorship is in keeping with an anglified educational policy that has, as J.F. Henry's David Macrae says in *Fernie Brae* (1947), 'reduced the Universal to the Imperial', so drowning what MacDiarmid regards as the authentic Scottish voice under the capitalist conformity of Britishness:

> Personal inflections and local variations are taboo; we aim at a deadly uniformity, not pausing to reflect how vital and valuable peculiarities of pronunciation, differences of tone and all the idiosyncrasies of expression, are in our actual 'walk and conversation', and ruthlessly eliminating all such from our literary practice.[202]

It is ironic given its aim of resuscitating the censored and languishing tradition of radical Scottish Republicanism that the publication of 'Red Scotland' was itself suppressed.

MacDiarmid's internationalist politics of place understand a genuinely beneficial generalist education to be one that appreciates the importance and encourages the propagation of difference, leading to the authentic self-creation of individual and

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[200] MacDiarmid, 'Foreword', P. Berresford Ellis and Seumas Mac a' Ghobhainn, *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1970), p. 14.
[201] Ibid., p. 15, 14.
[202] J.F. Hendry, *Fernie Brae: A Scottish Childhood* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987; 1947), p. 135; MacDiarmid, 'Red Scotland', p. 203.

nation. Few poets quote academics as often as MacDiarmid, yet he also exhibits disdain for the professionalization of literature. For all his insecure yet assiduous cultivation of academics and his own claims to scholarliness and cultural authority, MacDiarmid believed the professional interpreting class to be heavily implicated in the popularization of art that defeats the creative and political potentialities of difference. The next chapter argues that by using the generalism drawn from the academic tradition of a metaphysical Scotland, the modernist MacDiarmid writes an internationalist poetry of generalist knowledge emphasizing the particularity of local culture, so opposing global capitalism's specialized cultural division of labour and its short-circuiting of consciousness of the masses.

Chapter 5 **MACDIARMID AND THE MASSES**

God's with the majority surely.
I am not so sure....[1]

MacDiarmid's opposition to the Scottish educational system centres on his belief that its anglified specializing procedures block the possibility of instituting a truly national intelligentsia through a capitalistic denial of cultural and political difference. His self-determining politics of place propose a generalism drawn from an older metaphysical Scotland through which the Scots can imagine a radical new identity. The autodidact poet understood that specialization is by no means unique to Scotland's state schools. The blunting of individuality he perceived to be part of a Calvinist education is the bitter fruit of capitalism's division of labour. Concomitantly, the growth of a capitalist mass culture repudiates personal individuation and the true internationalism of national cultural and political diversity in favour of what Jean Baudrillard calls the 'universal of consumption'.[2] Seeking to re-establish the relationship between the local and universal effaced by capitalist homogeneity, MacDiarmid's internationalist politics of place synchronize radical resistance to national standardization and the intellectual short-circuiting of consciousness of the masses.

Born in 1892, MacDiarmid entered the world and grew to maturity during a time of rapid societal change, particularly in education. For John Carey, 'The difference between the nineteenth-century mob and the twentieth-century mass is literacy.'[3] Carey cites George Bernard Shaw's complaint that the 1871 Education Act created a mass of new readers seemingly uninterested in the cultural products of the intelligentsia. Instead, they would turn to mass circulation newspapers such as the

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[1] *CP1*, p. 504 ('Ode to All Rebels').
[2] Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. and intro. Charles Levin ([New York (?)]:Telos Press, 1981), p. 58.
[3] John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 5.

Daily Mail, established by Lord Northcliffe in 1896, for informative entertainment.[4] Published in 1992, a century after MacDiarmid's birth, Carey's *The Intellectuals and the Masses* is a seminal study of the antagonistic, yet indivisible, association between modernism and the masses. Considering his rural, working-class background, MacDiarmid would have been an obvious beneficiary of the drive to increase literacy and extend educational opportunities. However, like many of the modernists studied by Carey, the autodidact MacDiarmid was uneasy about the cultural consequences of democracy and universal education. Taking its lead from Carey's book, this chapter will examine the relation of MacDiarmid's politics of place to the masses.

MacDiarmid was a self-declared cultural elitist, yet also a lifelong socialist; he believed that high art could be produced only by the few, while desiring that such art should be presented directly to the many, the workers. Hugh MacDiarmid the mandarin of the working class and socialist elitist may sound like a contradictory position; and indeed, the inconsistencies apparent in such a stance are usually assumed to be the ideological transgressions of a poet of Whitmanesque propensities. However, 'MacDiarmid and the Masses' argues that the seeming contradictions of MacDiarmid's position *vis-à-vis* elitism actually inhere in the nature of capitalism and its culture and are not, therefore, the essence of the poet's politics and personality. MacDiarmid's poetic journey from the irrationalism of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, through the mystical communism of the 'Hymns to Lenin', to the hieratic materialism of *In Memoriam James Joyce* marks the poet's awareness of the ideological shortcomings of an elitist metropolitan modernism and his attempt to understand and combat the political forces underpinning such alienated reaction.

This chapter will challenge the traditional view of MacDiarmid as an elitist by contending that his marginalization in geopolitical and class terms leads him to oppose

[4] See Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 6.

the metropolitan construction of a mass capitalist culture through a radically autonomous politics of place. Writing high art from the peripheries – twenties Montrose, thirties Whalsay and a provincialized Scotland – the modernist MacDiarmid formulates a politics and poetics that emphasizes the particularity of local culture and the civilizational benefits of difference. In the face of global capitalist conformity, MacDiarmid draws on the academic tradition of a metaphysical Scotland to write an international poetry of generalist knowledge that contests the specialized cultural division of labour and the commodification of literature. The chapter will examine four key areas in MacDiarmid's thought (which will be subtitled): culture as spiritual evolution ('The Self-Elected Elect'); the leading of the masses by an authoritarian communist elite ('The Cadre of Spiritual Communism'); the parasitical professionalization of literature ('The Interpreting Class'); and the political gulling of the masses through entertainment ('The Short-Circuiters of Consciousness'). In each topic we see MacDiarmid reaching for unity through the tangle of his seemingly paradoxical positions, his internationalist politics of place striving for the synthesis of local and universal in a dialectic of poetry and prose that spans the paradigmatic shift from modernism to postmodernism.

One crucial theme of Carey's *The Intellectuals and the Masses* is the recognition that writers construct and do not simply reflect reality. This would seem to be a fairly obvious idea and can be usefully applied to any literary era, not just Carey's modernism. Nineteenth-century novelists, such as Jane Austen and Henry James for instance, attempt to justify class hierarchy through the plot device of the wise or foolish marriage. The hero, or more usually heroine, must develop a strong group or class-consciousness in order to choose the correct partner in marriage, someone of 'good character'. Individualistic choices tend to lead the heroine astray into choosing a bad egg, such as Isabel Archer's marriage to the aesthete Gilbert Osmond in James's

The Portrait of a Lady (1881). James wishes the reader to believe that class hierarchy is just and natural: the ruling class is such because its members have better characters, not just more money, land and power, than those they rule. Economic forces outside of the parameters of the personal are ignored as a needless distraction. The rich, by and large, are the best sorts of people and marriage should be a perpetuation of the type. What on the surface may appear to be a tale of romance becomes a hegemonic construction of reality in the interests of the ruling bloc. If this recreates the upper classes as being better than they would be in life, then Carey's modernists rewrite the masses to be worse.

If the rich are personalized in the nineteenth-century novel then the masses are depersonalized by the modernist, reduced from potential individuality to being no more than a face in the crowd, one of the nameless mob. According to Carey, 'This is normal intellectual practice' for the modernist writer:

> Rewriting or reinventing the mass was an enterprise in which early twentieth-century intellectuals invested immense imaginative effort, and it naturally generated a wide variety of identities. The aim of all these rewritings was the same, however: to segregate the intellectuals from the mass, and to acquire the control over the mass that language gives.[5]

In Carey's reading, the intellectual and artist of modernism create themselves by separating from the mass: they possess individuality of a special, qualitative kind, while the mass, sheer quantity by definition, lacking determination and form other than that given it by the intellectual, is Other.

As Carey implies, this clearly has anti-democratic political implications. If the majority does not consist of individuals, but is only an amorphous creation of the intellectual minority, then the majority can very easily be ignored or moulded to suit the political dictates of an elite. Questions arise as to the nature of the artistic

[5] Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 23.

personality and the role of the imagination in everyday life. Carey correctly pinpoints the importance of Nietzsche's thought to the modernists, yet the German was a lonely, almost pathetic figure, plagued by bad health, who eventually succumbed to insanity. Does 'illness act as a short cut to reality', creating a seer cut off from ordinary humanity?[6] Or, as Cyril Connolly asks of Pascal and Leopardi, 'did their deformities encourage the herd to treat them thoughtlessly, and so create in them a pejorative impression of human nature?'.[7] The very terms of Connolly's question suggest that the philosopher and poet stand above 'the herd', in spite of their 'deformities'. In attempting to define how an artist or 'highbrow' is created, W.H. Auden suggests that 'We only think when we are prevented from feeling or acting as we should like', thus echoing the Freudian view of artist as neurotic.[8] He proceeds with the acidic comment that 'Most people, however, fit into society too neatly for the stimulus to arise except in a crisis such as falling in love or losing their money'.[9] For Auden, ordinary people never think except when their own interests are at stake; disinterested thought can only come from the real intelligentsia. But if the artist and thinker are cut off from society, made different by their powers of perception, what exactly is their value for those who 'fit into society too neatly'? Does the intelligentsia merely speak to itself?

The Self-Elected Elect

For the intellectual 'self-elected Elect' culture has a quasi-religious mission, one aphorized by MacDiarmid in 'Art and the Unknown': 'The function of art is the extension of human consciousness.'[10] First appearing in Orage's *New Age* in 1926, the

[6] Palinurus, *The Unquiet Grave* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945; 1944), p. 17.
[7] Ibid.
[8] W.H. Auden, 'Psychology and Art To-day', *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1986; 1977), p. 334.
[9] Ibid.
[10] *SP*, p. 39 ('Art and the Unknown').

essay strikes a characteristically modernist note: 'Comprehensibility is error: Art is beyond understanding.'[11] Or at least, it is beyond understanding for the majority: 'If great art is compatible with big popular appeal, it can only be in so far as it contains elements unthinkable to the public.'[12] 'Art and the Unknown' could stand as a prose manifesto for the metaphysical *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, published in the same year. As we shall see, this modernist poem is constituted by many of the same ideas as to the almost religious importance of art and its impenetrability to the masses. However, the belief that art is 'the most important of human activities', produced by and understandable only to the few, a necessary elite, was hardly new to modernism.[13] In Scotland, an elect pronouncing upon the unfitness of the majority to proceed to a higher level of heavenly existence has clear Calvinist resonance. Hamish Henderson has this in mind when denouncing MacDiarmid's involvement with the militantly nationalist 1320 Club as being undemocratic and potentially violent:

> Groups of 'self-elected Elect' have always been the bane of Scottish Home Rule politics. Gathered in disputatious huddles on the periphery of whatever rational and coherent activity they can find to disrupt, the self-elected Elect have done much to make Scottish self-government a subject for mockery not only south of the Border but among the broad masses of the Scottish people as well.[14]

MacDiarmid's reply is a defence of intellectual aristocracy and would have sounded like a compliment to Henderson, whose 'conception of "democracy" is what concurs with majority opinion'.[15] For MacDiarmid, 'People do vary in intellectual status', meaning that those of supposedly lower intellect should be told what is good for them by the intellectuals of the nation: 'Why deny this in favour of the undifferentiated

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[11] *SP*, p. 39 ('Art and the Unknown').
[12] *SP*, p. 41.
[13] *SP*, p. 39.
[14] Hamish Henderson, *The Armstrong Nose: Selected Letters of Hamish Henderson*, ed. Alec Finlay (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 164 (to the *Scotsman*, 21 February 1968).
[15] MacDiarmid, *The Armstrong Nose*, p. 165 (to the *Scotsman*, 26 February 1968).

mass, or accede to the demand of the latter that superior brains should acquiesce in the delimitation of their political and other objectives to conciliate the mass who cannot see beyond their noses?'.[16]

Ideas such as those expressed by MacDiarmid in the '1320 Club Flyting' with Hamish Henderson can be traced back to the rule of the philosopher-king in the slave state of Plato's *Republic*:

> when a community is founded on natural principles, the wisdom it has as a whole is due to the smallest grouping and section within it and to the knowledge possessed by this group, which is the authoritative and ruling section of the community. And we also find that this category, which is naturally the least numerous, is the one which inherently possesses the only branch of knowledge which deserves to be called wisdom.[17]

With Plato's *Republic,* written c. 370 BC, elitism and the intellectual invention of the *hoi polloi* would seem to be almost as old as Western culture itself. However, exclusion of the vulgar masses is certainly synonymous with cultural practice in the era of capitalism.

Culture has acted as a radical carrier of continuing human hope and political aspiration during the onslaught of industrialization, but also a reactionary system of denial – of access to a richer life and of the existence of the poorest – during that same revolutionary process. Alan Sinfield accurately points out this Janus-faced nature of culture in the realm of post-1945 capitalism:

> Literature and the arts were made to embody the spiritual and human values that consumer capitalism and 'mass' culture seemed to slight and, at the same time, were deployed as indicators for educational success and social mobility.[18]

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[16] MacDiarmid, *The Armstrong Nose*, p. 165 (to the *Scotsman*, 26 February 1968).
[17] Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998; 1994), p. 135.
[18] Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (London & Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1997; 1989), p. 2.

Sinfield's idea that the culture of capitalism can be used simultaneously in opposing political directions can be applied to earlier periods.

Coleridge's clerisy functioned as an intellectual elite to defend the timeless value of the spirit against the unpredictability of massive material change. Carlyle saw the 'Sign of the Times' in 1829 as being the incompatibility of culture with the ordinary lives of most of the population. By 1928, Julien Benda famously described the politicization of culture as *La Trahison des Clercs*, treasonable intellectuals being those who, inspired by the Romantic nationalism of the nineteenth century, abandoned the disinterested art of criticism for the ideological warfare that is modern democratic politics. For Benda, the artistic sensibility is inherently anti-democratic; the artist is the 'exceptional being'.[19] However, Benda and his spiritual ancestors confuse the nature of individual artistic distinction, and the alienation from the mass that they assume this will bring, with broader political and economic forces that according to Alan Swingewood stratify individuals according to their recognition of cultural signifiers:

> The capitalist division of labour continually refines this distinction between material labour and intellectual labour and with the evolution of modern civil society and the growth of the mass media, of newspaper publishing, magazines and pulp fiction, mass political parties and educational institutions, the role of the intellectual becomes increasingly significant in the genesis and transmission of bourgeois ideology.[20]

High culture can only exist through the deliberate exclusion of the many from the promise of cultural plenty. Benda and his cohorts may believe that they are defending traditional and timeless cultural values when in fact they are the preservers of a particular class ideology conducive to capitalism.

One of the most influential of the English self-elected Elect, Matthew Arnold, performs a similar trick of turning bourgeois beliefs into eternal verities. His *Culture*

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[19] Julien Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, trans. Richard Aldington (New York & London: Norton, 1969; 1928), p. 171.
[20] Alan Swingewood, *The Myth of Mass Culture* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977), p. 76.

and Anarchy, published in 1869 at the height of industrialization, asserts the religious importance of culture as 'a study of perfection', combating the 'besetting danger' of mechanization: 'The idea of perfection as an *inward* condition of the mind and spirit is at variance with the mechanical and material civilisation in esteem with us.'[21] Arnold converts class divisions into cultural distinctions. Outer, material categories become inner, spiritual ones with the upper class as Barbarians, the middle and organized working class Philistines, and the rest of the lower orders Populace. Written as a polemical attempt to unify the nation at a time of class discord, Arnold posits culture as a means to an understanding of 'our best self' that in turn 'suggests the idea of *the State*'.[22] The combination of a religiously inspired culture and State power clearly rules out an oppositional culture in favour of traditional class culture: 'The lovers of culture are unswervingly and with a good conscience the opposers of anarchy.'[23] Culture 'seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere'.[24] However, it is difficult to see how the culture that Arnold so firmly associates with the Oxford of his youth and with 'an inward spiritual activity' could achieve either of these propositions.[25]

MacDiarmid also understands that capitalism stratifies culturally as well as materially. For MacDiarmid, mass culture is created for majority consumption, facilitating the political quiescence of the working class through an intellectual short-circuiting of consciousness. High art is produced by the elect minority and under contemporary capitalist conditions can only be appreciated by the few. The interpreting class of capitalist culture acts as a bourgeois buffer between the mass and high art: if the retarding influence of the interpreting class is removed then the mass

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[21] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder, 1882; 1869), pp. 8, 15, 14.
[22] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, pp. 81, 80.
[23] Ibid., p. 229.
[24] Ibid., p. 44.
[25] Ibid., p. 36.

can respond freely to the potentially revolutionary individuation of high art. As we shall see, MacDiarmid writes a poetry of generalist knowledge issuing from the peripheries that opposes the specializing procedures of global capitalist culture by emphasizing the particularity of local culture, so articulating a radically internationalist politics of place.

MacDiarmid's provincialist modernism is 'at the opposite pole' from the obvious modernist inheritor of Arnold's mantle of leader of the elect, the metropolitan T.S. Eliot.[26] Eliot also discerns an important relationship between culture and religion. Ostensibly presenting himself as anti-Arnoldian, Eliot is less keen than Arnold to make a religion of culture: 'Arnold gives the impression that Culture (as he uses the term) is something more comprehensive than religion; that the latter is no more than a necessary element, supplying ethical formation and some emotional colour, to Culture which is the ultimate value.'[27] Eliot still believes, however, that the 'artistic sensibility is impoverished by its divorce from the religious sensibility'.[28] Indeed, for Eliot, 'no culture can appear or develop except in relation to a religion'.[29]

With the decline in importance of Christianity under contemporary conditions the resultant cultural waste land has become a definitive modernist trope. If culture is 'that which makes life worth living' and it is failing to develop through the degeneration of religion, then the cultured class, the intellectual elite that is attracted to membership of 'the dominant class', will feel its power and purposefulness to be on the wane.[30] In compensatory response to this loss of authority, those who do not share the traditional values of the cultural elite – the mass who neither understand nor care

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[26] *Company*, p. 274.
[27] T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949; 1948), p. 28.
[28] Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, p. 26.
[29] Ibid., p. 27.
[30] Ibid., pp. 27, 42.

that Western civilization is in decline – are depicted by this elite as being spiritually and intellectually dead:

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.[31]

Eliot may have been part of the spiritless London crowd when he wrote these lines, but he was also one of the educated few that inherit the threatened cultural legacy of, in particular but not specifically, the West. Eliot's metropolitan defence of the West differs markedly from MacDiarmid's ideological construction championing cultural and political autonomy for the margins. However, both modernists share the elect belief that they are alive enough in sensibility to pronounce the spiritual and cultural sterility of the mass of their contemporaries.

'The Waste Land' juxtaposes a concern with the passing of Western high culture with a glimpse into the lives of the ordinary, those of demotic culture. Eliot's use of the demotic has been praised, as if it lent this high modernist some popular appeal. However, its use in 'The Waste Land' only exposes the shabby emptiness of the life of its speaker as against the cultural importance of the poet's voice. It is almost as if the mass – 'Lil's husband', 'poor Albert' and 'young George' – are crushing the life out of the cultured elite through the robustly unending inanity of their very existence.[32] As in Pound's 'The Garden', the elite, those of 'exquisite' sensibility, will no longer breed, their cultural values lost to posterity; it is the 'rabble / Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor' who 'shall inherit the earth'.[33]

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[31] T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974; 1963), p. 65.
[32] Eliot, 'The Waste Land', *Collected Poems*, p. 68.
[33] Ezra Pound, 'The Garden', *Selected Poems 1908-1969* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977; 1975), p. 41.

Michael Tratner's claim that 'modernism was an effort to escape the limitations of nineteenth-century individualist conventions and write about distinctively "collectivist" phenomena' fails to address the negative attitude of many modernists to the masses.[34] MacDiarmid also displays this modernist sensibility of disdain, the scornfulness of the self-elected Elect for the intellectually ordinary and spiritually earthbound. The cosmological view of 'A Moment in Eternity' and the early Scots lyrics leads on to the superior-person mentality of the metaphysical *A Drunk Man*, written '*Sub specie aeternitatis*'.[35] The epigraph to the poem, taken from Sachervell Sitwell, indicates the direction in which MacDiarmid is about to take us:

> *Vast imbecile mentality of those*
> *Who cannot tell a thistle from a rose.*
> *This is for others....*[36]

Such contempt not only signals the idiocy of those who cannot understand that Scotland and England are different nations with distinctive cultures, but that there are also metaphysical discrepancies in their respective traditions. MacDiarmid was fond of using a quote, borrowed from his friend George Davie, of the Scottish philosopher David Masson on the difference between the philosophy of the Scots and English.

According to Masson, writing in 1852 in the *North British Review*, the thinking English person inclines to 'Quietism, mysticism; that soft, meditative disposition which takes things for granted in the co-ordination established by mere life and usage'.[37] This exemplifies a desire for inner harmony, which is 'alien to the Scotsman', who prefers to seek the stonier path, a line of thought that leads 'by the bleak sea-shore which parts the certain from the limitless'.[38] Davie explains that

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[34] Michael Tratner, *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 3.
[35] *CP1*, p. 128 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[36] *CP1*, p. 81.
[37] David Masson, quoted in *Company*, p. 245.
[38] Masson, in *Company*, p. 246.

Masson's objection was to the 'optimistic monism' of the 'Oxbridge philosophy' replacing the Common Sense school of Scotland's Universities.[39] For the Scots, 'the *onward progress* characteristic of physical science' could not be applied to metaphysics, as suggested by the fashionable English belief, unless one accepts their 'superficial view of life through rose-coloured spectacles'.[40] Never one to be 'contentit wi' the Rose' of English ideology, the MacDiarmid of *A Drunk Man* rejects their 'superficial' philosophical empiricism in favour of a Scottish metaphysic that 'parts the certain from the limitless'.[41]

With *A Drunk Man* MacDiarmid not only reasserts a native philosophical paradigm to aid his search for the metaphysical Scot, he also attempts to reconnect Scotland with continental European thought. Like many modernists, such as the 'Edward Moore' of *We Moderns* (1918), MacDiarmid found inspiration for his elect persona in the work of Nietzsche. Carey proposes that the modernists didn't derive from Nietzsche a logical philosophical method but rather the ideas of a philosophically inclined artist: 'He licensed a way of feeling, rather than a system of thought, which depended on metaphors, fantasies and pictorial projections.'[42] In the 'Preface' to *We Moderns* Edwin Muir says, 'The reader will look in vain in this book for a system', finding instead 'an attitude, and a perfectly distinct one' – actually a pale and unconvincing Nietzscheanism.[43]

Carey underestimates the liberatory quality of Nietzsche's concerted undermining of Christian belief and ethics. For questioning young men and women of MacDiarmid's generation, many raised in what they may have considered to be the intellectually airless atmosphere of Christian households, reading Nietzsche perhaps

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[39] G.E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999; 1961), p. 316.
[40] Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, pp. 315, 316.
[41] *CP1*, p. 107 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[42] Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 74.
[43] Edward Moore, *We Moderns: Enigmas and Guesses* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1918), p. 7.

gave them the courage of their burgeoning atheistic convictions. His greatest lesson, 'the commandment: *will* a self and thou shalt *become* a self' in order that 'You should become him who you are', envisages elite humans transcending the commonality of Christian ethics.[44] This message may have allowed many to outgrow a Christian childhood or persuaded others, such as Edwin Muir, to reconsider their own Nietzscheanism as youthful posturing and return to the Christian fold. MacDiarmid, however, in whatever poetic phase we find him, never left behind the spiritual evolutionism and religious atheism he gleaned from his first contact with Nietzsche through Orage's *New Age* and the magnificently misnamed Scottish translator of Nietzsche, Thomas Common:

> Man's the reality that mak's
> A'things possible, even himsel'.
> Energy's his miracle
> But hoo little he's dune wi't yet,
> Denyin't at ilka turn.
> Ilka change has Eternity's mandate.
> But hoo little we've changed since Adam,
> Frightened to open oor minds,
> Frightened to move.
> To the foolish a' comes and gangs lichtly
> But what can we dae wha's spirits
> Unceasingly strew dark on oor days
> And pride themsel's on't, makin' life harsh
> In oor herts, since a' that's Eternal
> Fears fulfilment.[45]

For Nietzsche, the goal of humankind is the production of the highest type of human being, the 'cultural aristocrat' like himself.[46] Nietzsche opposes politically equalizing, spiritually levelling forces such as Christianity and liberal democracy as

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[44] Nietzsche, *A Nietzsche Reader*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 232, 235.
[45] *CP1*, p. 282 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*); see *RT2*, pp. 369, 393, for MacDiarmid on Thomas Common; according to Christopher Harvie, the Victorian 'Scots were translators of Ibsen (William Archer), Nietzsche (Thomas Common), Proust (C.K. Scott-Moncrieff), and Freud (James Strachey)', *Scotland: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 178.
[46] Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 171.

favouring the many against the few. The elite of cultural workers who produce the future through their will to creative power can have nothing to say to those of mob mind and spirit, who require the anti-evolutionary State protection of democracy to save them from necessary extinction. When Nietzsche does tentatively approve of the democratic process it is simply in the hope of provoking an 'aristocratic countermovement' in culture and politics that will squash the interests of the mass.[47] Correspondingly, Nietzsche's fear of socialism is such that he deceptively endorses democratic reforms as a means of pacifying potentially radical workers' action.

Nietzsche did not live to see the rise of National Socialism in Germany but Carey and Detwiler, amongst others, draw definite parallels between his 'willingness to aestheticize politics' and fascism.[48] Nietzsche's appeal to modernist artists such as D.H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis and MacDiarmid lay not only in the central role given to the self-elected Elect such as themselves in his politically absolutist society, but also in his atheistical proposition from *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) that 'It is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified'.[49] As such, the artist is a replacement god giving life to a new system of values propounded in the religion of culture.

In line with the Edwin Muir of *Latitudes* (1924) who believes that Nietzsche 'brought a new atmosphere into European thought', the MacDiarmid of *A Drunk Man* seeks the inculcation of new cultural values in Scotland.[50] In this, we see MacDiarmid indulge in a similar line of 'polaristic thinking' informing the Nietzschean Apollonian-Dionysian dualism.[51] As discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, MacDiarmid's application of the dualistic Caledonian antisyzygy to the national culture enables him

[47] Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, p. 174.
[48] Ibid., p. 113.
[49] Nietzsche, quoted in Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, p. 104.
[50] Edwin Muir, 'A Note on Friedrich Nietzsche', *Latitudes* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1924), p. 86.
[51] John Burt Foster, Jr., *Heirs to Dionysus: A Nietzschean Current in Literary Modernism* (Princeton, NJ & Guildford, Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 42.

to balance Anglo-created distortions within a provincialized Scottish polity, as Nietzsche attempts the realization of a balanced human psyche. MacDiarmid sees the over-concentration in Scottish literature on the omnipresent figure of Burns, and the cult made of his person and perceived democratic ideals, as a danger to the future health of the culture. He believed in 1929 that 'aristocratic standards must be re-erected. We in Scotland have been too long grotesquely over-democratised. What is wanted now is a species of Scottish Fascism'.[52] Such aristocratic extremism seeks to neutralize the baneful political popularity of Labour Unionism and lead 'Towards a Scottish Renaissance'.

As well as thinking it one of Burns's poorer pieces, hardly meriting its world renown, MacDiarmid deplored the 'A Man's a Man for a' That' egalitarian attitude of chummy ordinariness associated with the poem:

> Keep all your 'kindly brither Scots',
> Your little happinesses,
> Your popular holiday resorts,
> Your damned democracy.[53]

For MacDiarmid, such 'damned democracy' retards Scotland's intellectual and artistic development by keeping genius at the same level as the merely talented in a spirit akin to the 'I kent his faither' syndrome. However, the cost of such egalitarianism is greater than the price of simple personal put down: it implies the inability or unwillingness to produce and nurture a national intelligentsia, an elite of cultural workers. This 'determined "preference for the inferior"' is not specific to Burns but rather his cult which 'has denied his spirit to honour his name':

> The excessive futilities which have accompanied this cult are without parallel in the history of the world. Nations whose history has been starred with relays of men of poetic genius as great or greater than Burns have not

[52] *RT2*, p. 80 ('Towards a Scottish Renaissance: desirable lines of advance').
[53] *CP2*, p. 1055 ('The North Face of Liathach').

> allowed their significance to run to sand in this way – even if, at the very worst, they have had, in respect of this or that poet, a crop of antiquaries and bibliographers and biographers and marginalists of all kinds, at least all of them have had a powerful cultured class, a dominant intelligentsia, able to secure for each genius in turn his proper setting and an adequate valuation based on the essentials of his work, and thus to ensure his due influence. Their quality is not obscured and their force dissipated by hordes of mediocrities. Literature in these countries has its standards and its definite sphere and functions. It is only in Scotland where there are no cultural standards – where there is little love or appreciation of literature – that so grotesque a travesty of literary honour could have developed itself. What would Burns himself think of it all?[54]

The Burns cult is the cultural detritus of a provincialized Anglo-Scotland unable to develop an intelligentsia of its own. The final question, though rhetorical, has the implicit answer: the same as MacDiarmid, adherent of the self-elected Elect.

In all his writing on Burns, MacDiarmid manages rather adroitly a triadic process similar to that performed by Nietzsche in relation to Christ: disavowal, identification, and succession. Burns and Christ are twinned in *A Drunk Man* as Nietzschean *Übermenschen*, both hailed as contributors to the spiritual evolution of humanity, each suffering from the mob mentality of his followers:

> A greater Christ, a greater Burns, may come.
> The maist they'll dae is to gi'e bigger pegs
> To folly and conceit to hank their rubbish on.
> They'll cheenge folks' talk but no' their natures, fegs![55]

MacDiarmid uses Nietzsche's eternal recurrence to suggest that the lives of most newborn children are worthless since, unlike Christ, they will contribute nothing to spiritual progress or the extension of consciousness:

> Millions o' wimmen bring forth in pain
> Millions o' bairns that are no' worth ha'en'.
>
> Wull ever a wummen be big again
> Wi's muckle's a Christ? Yech, there's nae sayin'

[54] *A*, p. 207 ('Burns Today and Tomorrow'); *SP*, p. 104 ('The Burns Cult'); *CSS*, p. 354 ('The Burns Cult (I)').
[55] *CP1*, p. 86 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).

> Gin that's the best that you ha'e comin',
> Fegs but I'm sorry for you, wumman! [56]

The evolutionary potentiality of humanity is recurrently stillborn in these scornful lines.

MacDiarmid's elitism revolves around his spiritual evolutionism, a desire that Scotland and humanity be better than at present, finding a goal, religious in scope yet of earthly application. MacDiarmid is keen to avoid a culture 'victimized by repetition-compulsion' inflicted through the overemphasis on Burns and the imaginative incapacity of his disciples.[57] Like Christianity, the Burns cult acts as a false interpreter, seeking to dilute the sheer difficulty of the ideals espoused by the individual of genius in order to allow for easy application in the lives of the mediocre many. MacDiarmid's poet is on the side of genius, happy to follow 'The road that led me past / humanity sae fast', free to construct his own values since being 'Lowsed frae the dominion / O' popular opinion'.[58] Echoing Nietzsche, MacDiarmid cries, 'O hard it is for man to ken / He's no creation's goal'.[59] As in Nietzsche's work, no ultimate goal for humanity is stated – 'I dinna haud the warld's end in my heid / As maist folk think they dae' – but MacDiarmid's evolutionary politics of place face creatively forward.[60]

According to George Davie, 'the "thocht" of the *Drunk Man* is not irrationalist in the technical sense', not being inspired by MacDiarmid's master, Shestov.[61] However, the metaphysical value-system of the poem owes as much to the self-hating irrationalism of Dostoevsky's 'splintered psychology' as it does to the aristocratic

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[56] *CP1*, p. 103 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[57] *CP1*, p. 635 ('To the Younger Scottish Writers').
[58] *CP1*, p. 141 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[59] *CP1*, p. 129.
[60] *CP1*, p. 87.
[61] G.E. Davie, *The Crisis Of the Democratic Intellect: The Problem of Generalism and Specialisation in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), p. 112.

spiritual evolutionism of Nietzsche.[62] For Nietzsche, Dostoevsky was the great psychologist, taking brilliant estimate of the unfathomable human heart; for MacDiarmid's drunk man, he is the 'Christ of the neist thoosand years'.[63] Like Nietzsche, MacDiarmid values Dostoevsky because he licenses radically individualistic vision. It is Dostoevskian characters, such as the existential anti-hero, the 'sick' and 'angry man', of *Notes from Underground* (1864) – for whom two and two decidedly do not make four: 'what have the laws of nature or arithmetic to do with me, when for some reason I don't like those laws or twice two?' – that help create the seer MacDiarmid.[64] When the 'self-tormented spirit' of the drunk man turns 'to debauchery and dirt, / And to disease and death' he adopts the loser wins posture that Jean-Paul Sartre apportions to the psychosomatically sick Gustave Flaubert, *l'idiot de la famille*.[65] This entails the assumption of a mystical life-in-death faith that enables its bearer to fully experience the tragic sense of life, to painfully see what the many, who are dead to life, can never imagine: the awaited heaven of artistic posterity.

So the drunk man asks, 'What are prophets and priests and kings, / What's ocht to the people o' Scotland?'.[66] For the seer, the ordinary see nothing but themselves; like the self-important and circumscribed talk of rural 'ploomen in a pub', the population of the metropolitan nerve centres of Scotland, Edinburgh and Glasgow, 'want to hear o' naething / But their ain foul hubbub'.[67] Even with his extreme self-consciousness, however, the drunk man rationalizes that 'The fules are richt; an extra thocht / Is neither here nor there'.[68] He comes to 'envy' the uncultured 'rude health',

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[62] Peter McCarey, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Russians* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 31.
[63] *CP1*, p. 139 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[64] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground / The Double*, trans. Jessie Coulson (London: Penguin, 1972; 1864 / 1846), pp. 16, 23.
[65] *CP1*, pp. 105, 128 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*); see Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert*, 4 vols., trans. Carol Cosman (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991; 1971).
[66] *CP1*, p. 108 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

the limited perception of the ploughmen Cruivie and Gilsanquhar that saves them from the 'curse' of the visionary: the 'gnawin' canker' of an intellect diseased through the exacerbation of comprehension which yet breeds the soul that separates the self-elected Elect from the mob.[69] The irrationalist makes a virtue out of being in the wrong ('To hell wi' happiness!') – that place of creative contradiction 'whaur extremes meet' – the better to look down on the pitiful spectacle of 'the curst conceit o' bein' richt / That damns the vast majority o' men'.[70] After all, what is it to be right, to have made much of one's life materially, if one is spiritually so small?

> A'thing that ony man can be's
> A mockery o' his soul at last.
> The mair it shows't the better, and
> I'd suner be a tramp than king,
> Lest in the pride o' place and poo'er
> I e'er forgot my waesomeness.[71]

Yet in spite of the elitism of MacDiarmid's visionary poet surveying the spiritual nullity of Scotland and the world – the universal, as always with MacDiarmid's politics of place, contained within the local – he uses his powers to prophesy the spiritual evolution of humanity:

> And organs may develop syne
> Responsive to the need divine
> O' single-minded humankin'.[72]

The task of developed consciousness is to use the visionary mysticism that has probed 'man's benmaist hert', the mystery of the inner world, in order 'To bring what lies withoot to licht'.[73] It is the 'function' of 'Poetry' to effect 'that unity' of ruptured subject and object, so constantly recreating the meaning of life: 'The ideal observer of

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[69] *CP1*, p. 108 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[70] *CP1*, p. 281 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*); p. 87 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[71] *CP1*, p. 128 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).
[72] *CP1*, p. 163.
[73] Ibid.

art [...] is God'.[74] Only the poet as Christ can achieve this task, the sacrificial artist conjoined with mystic as spiritual evolutionist. After such knowledge as the drunk man has reaped from his spiritual odyssey only Silence is left, and the descent of the self-elected Elect to rejoin common humanity.

MacDiarmid wants a metaphysical Scot who will reveal the nation's true historical destiny, a Nietzschean figure intellectually and spiritually equipped to make whole the dualistic fractures of the past. His elect spiritual evolutionism, inherited from the very Calvinism that the poet repudiates, envisions an eternalized nation transcending the Scottish waste land – this Eliotian idea being, in any case, a metropolitan malady indicative of waning cultural and political predominance. For MacDiarmid, a metaphysical Scotland can usurp an exhausted imperial England. However, as MacDiarmid moves from the evolutionary optimism of *A Drunk Man* to the defeated Celticism of *To Circumjack Cencrastus* he begins to understand that the irrationalism on which he has relied to reveal the great man who will lead Scotland from its provincialized state is a symptom of the capitalist disorder that alienates the visionary poet from the masses.

In moments of spiritual and creative crisis in *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, MacDiarmid glimpses the possibility that his lofty conception of the evolutionary importance of creativity is the ineffectual vanity of the solitary, brusquely challenged by the sheer banality of life with its necessity of earning a living. The visionary poet believes the masses to be responsible for their own servitude and, in moments of despair at his own grand evolutionary design, it seems nothing will change:

> I'm oot for shorter oors and higher pay
> And better conditions for a' workin' folk
> But ken the hellish state in which they live's
> Due maistly to their ain mob cowardice.
> Yet tho' a' men were millionaires the morn

[74] *CP1*, p. 163; *SP*, p. 39 ('Art and the Unknown').

As they could easily be
They'd be nae better than maist rich folk noo
And nocht that maitters much 'ud be improved
And micht be waur.[75]

The poet curses all that compels him to 'pretend or feel / That life as maist folk hae't is real', yet understands that it is 'Pars aboot meetins', weddins, sermons a' / The crude events o' life-in-the-raw' that are more important to the majority than 'this poetry stuff'.[76] The superiority complex of his spiritual evolutionism and creator's hubris jar with the undoubted unpopularity of his work ('I canna gie the folk hokum') and the subordinate position he suffers at the hands of 'the system that can gie / A coof like' the Boss 'control o' me'.[77] Reaching his spiritual nadir at the mid-point of the poem, MacDiarmid sees the futility of his creative design:

Progress? There is nae progress; nor sall be,
The cleverest men aye find oot again
For foolish mobs that follow to forget,
As in the Past, the knowledge men ha'e haen
At stented periods frae the dawn o' Time:
And Sisyphus anew begins his climb.[78]

The final line signals his willingness to start afresh, be reborn to a new design. The next stanza challenges the elitism of the above by suggesting that perhaps the fame of the 'cleverest men' of the past deserves to be eclipsed in the present by the 'standards' of the 'mighty masses that we ken nocht o''.[79] Still refusing to discard his spiritual evolutionism, yet attempting to disentangle himself from the individualistic irrationalism of *A Drunk Man*, MacDiarmid now appends it the masses. The communist MacDiarmid is born of the struggle between the alienated irrationalism bred from the forces of capitalism seeking to short-circuit consciousness, and his new

[75] *CP1*, pp. 228-9 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[76] *CP1*, pp. 234, 235.
[77] *CP1*, pp. 252, 235.
[78] *CP1*, p. 243.
[79] Ibid.

belief that rationality and knowledge will defeat the mental limits imposed by 'the High Treason to mankind' of capitalist instrumental reason.[80] As MacDiarmid leaves provincial Montrose for Depression London, then industrial Liverpool and on to the poverty of Whalsay in the 1930s, a metaphysical Scotland seems more like a bourgeois fantasy than a political necessity.

Many of the ideas of the self-elected Elect would seem to belong on the political Right, veering towards the fascistic, despite MacDiarmid's protestation in 1923 that 'Scottish Fascism will spring naturally from the Left'.[81] The cultural aristocracy of Nietzsche combined with Dostoevsky's reactionary irrationalism create a MacDiarmidian spiritual evolutionism that owes much to his Calvinist heritage, and which comes to resemble extreme *laissez-faire* right-wing economics applied to spirituality – to the 'strong' go the glittering prizes, the 'weak' be damned. However, MacDiarmid's coming to communism in the thirties does not necessarily contradict the irrationalism of his great 1920s work *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle.* MacDiarmid describes himself in *Lucky Poet* as 'the extremes of High Tory and Communist meeting' and there are certain similarities in MacDiarmid's conception of these seemingly antagonistic positions.[82] Each is an authoritarian, highbrow project that sees the real enemy as the philistine bourgeoisie, the middle-class middlebrow. John Carey identifies the root of the intellectual's disdain for the bourgeoisie in 'The Suburbs and the Clerks':

> The massive expansion of suburbia, and the antagonisms, divisions and sense of irrecoverable loss it generated, were major shaping factors in twentieth-century English culture. They exacerbated the intellectual's feeling of isolation from what he conceived of as philistine hordes, variously designated the middle classes or the bourgeoisie, whose dullness and small-mindedness the intellectual delights in portraying (that is, inventing).[83]

[80] *CP2*, p. 899 ('Third Hymn to Lenin').
[81] *RT1*, p. 84 ('Plea for a Scottish Fascism').
[82] *LP*, p. 4.
[83] Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 50.

For specifically English writers, many of whom were from the 'educated and comfortably-off' middle to upper-middle class, the rise of the suburbs built to house the petite bourgeoisie encroached upon or destroyed the idyll of their own leafy residence.[84] However, for the working-class MacDiarmid, personal resentment of the middle class may be based on their refusal of his employment in any cultural capacity in the years after leaving Montrose. More broadly, his ideological objections centre on their possession of cultural power in what he saw as the polite, anglicized St. Andrews and Edinburgh schools of literature that denationalized the Scottish scene. On a psychological level, MacDiarmid as irrationalist of the self-elected Elect and spiritual communist share a detestation of bourgeois values as a block on revolutionary creativity and political progress. 'I would never care a brass farthing for what any man had, but only for what he *was*, and preserve an absolute absence of the enthusiasm of the market-place' writes this Burns-influenced radical Scottish Republican from the austerity of Whalsay.[85] Claiming that he has 'no use for anything between genius and the working man', MacDiarmid's communism resembles his earlier mysticism in its absolutist distrust of the democratic mean.[86]

The Cadre of Spiritual Communism

If the intellectual hero of the drunk man is Dostoevsky, reactionary apostle of the irrational, then the 'greater Christ' of MacDiarmid's messianic materialism is Vladimir Ilich Lenin.[87] As we have seen from his period in Montrose, MacDiarmid's interest in Lenin stretches back to the years immediately following the revolutions of

[84] Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 47.
[85] *LP*, p. 92; metropolitan artist-*manqué* Cyril Connolly believes 'A comfortable person can seldom follow up an original idea any further than a London pigeon can fly', Palinurus, *The Unquiet Grave* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945; 1944), p. 15.
[86] *LP*, p. 402.
[87] *CP1*, p. 86 (*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*).

1917, the poet's spiritual communism rooted in memories of Langholm. This long-standing concern with events in Russia helps explain MacDiarmid's dislike of what he saw as the opportunistic thirties communism of the English public school Oxbridge set, particularly that of 'MacSpaunday'. The working-class autodidact Scot doubted the revolutionary credentials of the university-educated upper-middle class English intelligentsia, assuming their metropolitan concerns to be culturally elitist and politically imperialistic. However, a fundamental tenet of the Leninism to which the spiritual communist MacDiarmid sings three hymns is that the masses have to be led to revolutionary action through the theoretical guidance of a cadre of elite intellectuals. First published in Germany in 1902, *What is to be Done?* is perhaps the best source for Lenin's idea that 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'.[88]

Theory is fundamental to revolutionary design because only through it can class consciousness be built; without this consciousness, potential revolutionary activity descends to the level of mere revolt, 'a purely spontaneous movement' with no lasting social and political efficacy.[89] The battle between what Lenin terms the 'spontaneous' and 'conscious' working-class movement is a choice between the reformism of the former and the revolution that will follow from the latter:

> Threading with great skill the intricate shuttling path
> From 'spontaneity' to preoccupation with design,
> From the realistic 'moment' to the abstraction of essential form
> And ending with a fusion of all their elements,
> At once realistic and abstract[90]

MacDiarmid sees Lenin's revolutionary propaganda as a fusion of theory and practice presaging his own synthesis of poetry and politics. Those who advise spontaneity –

[88] V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, trans. Joe Finesberg and George Hanna, ed. Robert Service (London: Penguin, 1989; 1902), p. 91.
[89] Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, p. 98.
[90] *CP2*, p. 899 ('Third Hymn to Lenin').

that is, a working-class movement purely from within the proletariat, with no guiding intellectual consciousness brought from without – condemn the workers 'to a strengthening of the influence of bourgeois ideology' such as evidenced in the reformism of the trade-union movement.[91] Yet, paradoxically, the conscious element brought to the workers from outside their number that will advance revolutionary action is the theoretical input of a vanguard of bourgeois intellectuals, a group to which Lenin belonged but whose capacity for undialectical free-thinking he violently mistrusted: 'the intellectuals, the lackeys of capital, who think they're the brains of the nation. In fact, they're not its brains, they're its shit'.[92] However, the university-educated Lenin, whose mother had inherited a landed estate, continually insists in *What is to be Done?* on the inability of the workers to develop a revolutionary consciousness for themselves.

Lenin believes 'that it is only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers' that revolutionary consciousness can be developed.[93] In other words, too stupefied by the alienating mechanisms of capitalism, the workers cannot advance their consciousness beyond the level of bourgeois ideology in order to dispense with the leadership of bourgeois intellectuals. This would imply that Lenin believes that bourgeois intellectuals such as himself stand outside of the economic realm, objective in respect of capitalist relations in comparison with the compromised subjectivism of the proletariat. He is, however, aware that the ideological roots of communism lie within the very class privilege that it purports to abolish:

> The teachings of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by the intelligentsia. By their social status, the founders

[91] Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, p. 105.
[92] Lenin, quoted in Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001; 1999), p. 278.
[93] Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, p. 143.

> of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of social-democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.[94]

Just as Lenin alleges that the workers are too implicated in the capitalist process to understand it sufficiently to construct a revolutionary alternative, the elitism that dictates that the workers must be the revolutionary tools of bourgeois intellectuals re-enacts the very exploitative relations of capitalism which communism seeks to break.

For George Konrád and Ivan Szelényi, the working class was used as a 'particular interest' through which Bolshevism seized power.[95] The intellectuals on the road to class power in Western capitalist society achieve their authority as the interpreting class by disguising their class allegiance behind the mask of professional disinterestedness; in the old Eastern bloc, bourgeois intellectuals achieved hegemony through even more disingenuous means. According to Konrád and Szelényi, 'for Lenin the function of the workers' party was not to represent workers' interests, but to prepare for the seizure of power and to serve as the organizational prototype of a new form of state power'.[96] When self-elected Elect MacDiarmid writes

> Here lies your secret, O Lenin, – yours and oors,
> No' in the majority will that accepts the result
> But in the real will that bides its time and kens
> The benmaist resolve is the poo'er in which we exult

he approves this authoritarianism of Leninism as an '*inward necessity*' or spiritual power, similar to the Will of Nietzsche, that is coincident with his art.[97]

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[94] Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, p. 98.
[95] George Konrád and Ivan Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, trans. Andrew Arato and Richard E. Allen (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979), p. 142.
[96] Konrád and Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, p. 140.
[97] *CP1*, pp. 298-299 ('First Hymn to Lenin'); p. 327 ('Second Hymn to Lenin').

Even in his communist poems MacDiarmid assumes the cultural to be more important than the political; indeed, political revolution is fundamentally needed only in order to free the workers from the economic forces that block their access to high culture. Lenin's authoritarian materialism is 'richt', but only as far as it goes; as a poet, the Scot is 'Aimin' at mair than you aimed at / Tho' yours comes first, I know it'.[98] Having established himself in a previous incarnation as a modernist poet of the irrational with *A Drunk Man*, scorning the intellectual and spiritual abilities of the many to understand the metaphysics of the self-elected Elect, the communist MacDiarmid now wishes to '*win through to the man in the street*':

> *Are my poems spoken in the factories and fields,*
> *In the streets o' the toon?*
> *Gin they're no', then I'm failin' to dae*
> *What I ocht to ha' dune.*[99]

This does not seem to square with the elitist MacDiarmid who declares himself in 1959 'an unrepentant and militant highbrow'.[100] However, even in his desire to reach the supposedly uncultured mass, MacDiarmid,'no prophet of easy things', does 'not believe that the great body of the public needs nothing but "pap"'.[101] Rather, this proponent of what is difficult – 'Nae simple rhymes for silly folk / But the haill art' – equates the challenging intellectuality of modernist poetry with the rigours of the marxist dialect: 'as Lenin gied / Nae Marx-without-tears to workin' men / But the fu' course insteed'.[102]

For MacDiarmid, Lenin is the great 'Barbarian saviour o' civilization', his communism that which ensures the continuance of culture in the face of capitalist

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[98] *CP1*, p. 323 ('Second Hymn to Lenin').
[99] Ibid.
[100] *A*, p. 232 ('Burns Today and Tomorrow').
[101] *RT3*, p. 374 ('Joseph Conrad and His Scottish Friends'); *A*, p. 232 ('Burns Today and Tomorrow').
[102] *CP1*, p. 325 ('Second Hymn to Lenin').

depredation.[103] He repeatedly quotes with significant approval Lenin's insistence that 'It would be a very serious mistake to suppose that one can become a Communist without making one's own the treasures of human knowledge'.[104] The communist cannot ignore 'more than two thousand years of development of human thought', dismissing it as a ghastly Christian error, but must assimilate the cultural glories of the past, ensuring that they inform the communist future.[105] Communism is, in fact, 'the final outcome' of the accumulation of knowledge to date, the spiritual synthesis of twenty centuries of material progress.[106]

The irrationalist of the self-elected Elect and member of the cadre of spiritual communism share a disinterested concern with the evolution of ordinary humanity into the realms of cultural genius. For MacDiarmid, communism could ensure

> that scientific development and a better social order can tap genius in every human being and create a society in which men like the greatest philosophers, poets, and scientists in human history will no longer be, as they have always been hitherto, very rare exceptions, but the rule – most men will be of a stature like that of Plato or Homer or Shakespeare.[107]

Perhaps a more realistic desire would be that most men and women would be able to read with unremitting access and understanding the classics of the Western canon. However, somewhat stretching the theory of disinterestedness – an Arnoldian concept he borrowed from Orage: 'whoever has understood the meaning of "disinterestedness" is not far off the goal of human culture' – to which he alludes in both *A Drunk Man* and 'Second Hymn to Lenin', MacDiarmid actually seeks the evolutionary triumph of his own type, the cultural creator, at the expense of those who create the material civilization through which culture can be enjoyed.[108] The poet repeats the fault of the

[103] *CP1*, p. 324 ('Second Hymn to Lenin').
[104] *LP*, p. 153.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] *LP*, p. 237.
[108] A.R. Orage, quoted in *RT2*, pp. 375-6 ('Allen Upward and the Facilitation of Genius').

capitalist culture that his communism purportedly seeks to erase: an ideological overemphasis on the importance of the superstructure to the detriment of the base. Hence MacDiarmid's repeated insistence that civilization has been built by 'an infinitesimal minority of mankind' who have had to fight to see the results of their genius come to fruition 'in the teeth of extreme indifference and often active opposition from the vast majority'.[109]

MacDiarmid makes much of Lenin in the thirties, the revolutionist becoming one of the poet's great men of genius. However, the Russian died in April 1924 when MacDiarmid was working towards a metaphysical Scotland while in Montrose. MacDiarmid's conception of a revolutionary Red Scotland, constructed while living in Shetland in the thirties, is inspired by John Maclean whom Lenin 'appointed Bolshevik Consul for Scotland' in 1917.[110] MacDiarmid's internationalist communism has a securely Scottish base as the 'alternative title' of 'Third Hymn to Lenin', 'Glasgow Invokes the Spirit of Lenin', illustrates.[111] Despite social unrest in Glasgow leading to the riot in George Square on 31 January 1919, the image of a potentially revolutionary Red Clydeside has been disputed. According to David Howell, 'any characterisation of Glasgow as a potential "Red Base" must come to terms with the fact that less than one in five of the Glasgow electorate [in 1918] met even the undemanding requirement of a vote for Labour'.[112] Glasgow and Scotland remained staunchly Unionist and mainly conservative. A radical Scottish Republicanism is the hidden tradition of a political minority reformulated by MacDiarmid from the marginality of Whalsay. For all MacDiarmid's new-found materialism, a Red Scotland is an essentialist notion of the real Scotland similar to the metaphysical model

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[109] *LP*, p. 407.
[110] Editor's 'Commentary' by Angus Calder, *RT3*, p. 630.
[111] *CP2*, p. 893 ('Third Hymn to Lenin').
[112] David Howell, *A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 193.

elaborated by the irrationalist poet of the self-elected Elect in Montrose. MacDiarmid's revolutionary Red Scotland requires the theoretical reinforcement of an elite cadre of communist intellectuals.

MacDiarmid garnered strength for his elitism from James Harvey Robinson's *The Mind in the Making* (1921). Robinson's book appealed to MacDiarmid because of an understated Nietzscheanism that attempts to bring ideological and ethical values in line with scientific discovery and material advances. Its thesis resembles Nietzsche in its belief that the 'ubiquitous rationalisation' that MacDiarmid insists passes for modern mass thinking, lags behind our actual civilizational practice as developed by an elite minority:

> James Harvey Robinson, in *Mind in the Making*, (Watts' Thinkers Library) says that all the arts and sciences – all that constitutes civilisation – have been built up since the dawn of human history by an infinitesimal percentage of the population, a percentage that has been constant at all times and in all countries, and remains so today. And he adds – if that tiny percentage could be eliminated all the rest of mankind could do nothing whatever to reconstitute or develop civilisation.[113]

For the autodidact MacDiarmid wishing to institute a Scottish intelligentsia fit to challenge national provincialization, Robinson's elitist message 'has a shrewd bearing on the failure' to preserve the Scottish democratic intellect with its accent on the exceptional 'lad o' pairts', in preference to 'the present insistence that education must be for all the pupils and the brighter ones must be held back in the interests of the dull majority'.[114]

As Nietzsche pilloried our continuing attachment to Christian ethics in an age in which observance of the religion is dwindling, so Robinson writes in favour of 'bringing the mind up to date' with the realities of our present existence.[115] We can

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[113] *RT2*, p. 375 ('Allen Upward and the Facilitation of Genius'); *RT3*, pp. 476-7 ('Beneath the English Over-Burden').
[114] *RT3*, p. 477 ('Beneath the English Over-Burden').
[115] James Harvey Robinson, *The Mind in the Making* (London: Watts, 1934; 1921), p. 11.

only hope to eradicate the possibility of future war and the obscenity of poverty amidst wealth if we 'proceed to the thorough reconstruction of our mind, with a view to understanding actual human nature, conduct, and organization'.[116] For Robinson, such leaps from old ways of thinking to new, radical standards have been achieved in the past by the few possessed of 'exceptional intellectual venturesomeness'; his book is a call for like-minds in the present to transform the world through the power of creative thought and individual genius.[117] According to Robinson, 'the great mass of humanity', of whatever historical era, have simply sat back and ungratefully accepted the civilizational fruits of 'a very small number of peculiarly restless and adventurous spirits'.[118] In a highly MacDiarmidian passage, Robinson asserts his elitist credo:

> Creative intelligence is confined to the very few, but the many can thoughtlessly avail themselves of the more obvious achievements of those who are exceptionally highly endowed. Even an ape will fit himself into a civilized environment.[119]

Such spurious academicism as espoused by Professor Robinson helps lend intellectual credibility to MacDiarmid's cerebralism, his solipsistic denunciation of humanism:

> I have no love for humanity – but only for the higher brain-centres, the human mind in which only a moiety of mankind has ever had, or has to-day, any part or parcel whatever. An intellectual snob of the worst description, in fact![120]

The Mind in the Making is an exposition of the forming of an elitist creative imagination and so appeals to the instinct for self-invention in MacDiarmid as the solitary, heroic poet ranged against the ignorant masses. With *To Circumjack*

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[116] Robinson, *The Mind in the Making*, p. 10.
[117] Ibid., p. 83.
[118] Ibid., p. 56.
[119] Ibid.
[120] *LP*, p. 78.

Cencrastus, for instance, the poet believes that the unacknowledged legislation of his art will lead the multitude it excludes:

> Better a'e gowden lyric
> The mob'll never ken
> For this in the last resort
> Mak's them less apes, mair men,
> And leads their leaders albeit
> They're owre blin' to see it.[121]

Robinson's book licenses this direction of the many through the ideas of the few. Its thinking is not only authoritarian in this sense but also shallow and ill-conceived. Like MacDiarmid, Robinson assumes that it is the cultural producers who transform the world, rather than that their creations reflect changes already happening in and through material development. As such, the argument of both poet and academic – that culture extends consciousness, which in turn creates more culture, and that this is *a priori* a good thing – is merely circular, leading, like MacDiarmid's Curly Snake of *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, nowhere but back to the self, the spiritual superiority of the elect cultural producer.

Despite the elite authoritarianism of his Leninism, with its belief in revolution from above, henceforth MacDiarmid claimed to be 'organically welded with the manual workers / As with no other class in the social system'.[122] In *Lucky Poet*, he writes of his 'vigilant determination to see that I allowed nothing to come between me and my class', being 'determined to strengthen and develop my organic relationship to the Commons of Scotland'.[123] MacDiarmid's assertion that he finds a place for his radical and republican politics in organic connection to the Scottish workers would suggest allusion to Gramsci's idea of the need for the proletariat to develop organic intellectuals from within its own class. This seems to be a less elitist idea than Lenin's

[121] *CP1*, p. 266 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[122] *CP1*, p. 656 ('Manual Labour').
[123] *LP*, p. 232.

intellectual cadre. However, the organic intellectuals develop the theoretical and political direction of the workers toward revolutionary action through the totalitarian leadership of the Communist Party which Gramsci names, in allusion to the importance of Machiavelli's thought on his work, 'The Modern Prince'.[124]

MacDiarmid was probably introduced to Gramsci by Hamish Henderson, who mentions in a letter to 'Chris' from Milan in 1950 that he is 'working hard' on a translation of Gramsci's 'Letters from Prison'.[125] Five years later, with the publication of *In Memoriam James Joyce*, MacDiarmid calls Gramsci 'That heroic genius' for his 'Disinterested' study of 'Comparative linguistics in prison', quoting from 'his *Lettere dal Carcere*'.[126] For Gramsci, 'All men are intellectuals', but only a minority 'have in society the function of intellectuals'.[127] The 'new stratum of intellectuals', the organic intellectuals of the working class, must adapt their knowledge to the conditions of modern life; as such, 'technical education, closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual'.[128] The idea of the new intellectual being acquainted with subjects foreign to the humanity-bound discourse of the traditional, 'vulgarised type of the intellectual' of the ruling order – 'the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist' – would have appealed to the marxist MacDiarmid who believes that the discoveries of science should inform modern poetry because 'Art must be related to the central issues of life'.[129]

Notwithstanding his insistence that they are not true intellectuals and belong to a decadent class, Gramsci is of interest to the cultural intelligentsia due to his theory that

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[124] See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998; 1971), pp. 125-205.
[125] Henderson, *The Armstrong Nose*, p. 42.
[126] *CP2*, p. 745 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*); Henderson claims that MacDiarmid is here 'quoting an unsigned article in the TLS', *The Armstrong Nose*, p. 166.
[127] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 9.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.; *CP1*, p. 634 ('To the Younger Scottish Writers').

modern capitalist hegemony is actuated at the superstructural level. If political society, or the State, effects power as force through government agencies such as the army and police, then the civil society – a concept first elaborated by Adam Ferguson in *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1776) – of social and cultural relationships engineered through education, the law and religion establishes power through consent. In order to wrestle political authority from a ruling order, an emergent class in modern society must first gain hegemonic control through a war of position within civil society before it can dominate the State functions of the nation: hence the importance for the working class of developing an organic intellectual elite able to challenge the cultural authority of traditional intellectuals. Like the autodidactic MacDiarmid, Gramsci understood the importance of education as a root to societal change; both knew that in a capitalist society education is a class issue, hegemony being necessarily pedagogical. Writing of Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Luciano Pellicani explains that 'every hegemony is founded on a *historical* bloc, [...] an organic system of social alliances held together by a common ideology and a common culture'.[130] The 'educatit classes' may celebrate the centenary of Goethe or Scott in order to conserve their present political dominance, but the workers will never know the big names recycled from the past of bourgeois culture.[131] Blocked by the class interests of a stratified education system and a bourgeois interpreting class 'wha find / The present owre muckle for their nerve', the workers must develop their own culture, one that goes far beyond 'Framed pictures of the grocer's calendar type', if they are to challenge the capitalist order.[132]

MacDiarmid's Gramscian emphasis on the importance of culture to the class battle underlines the spirituality of the poet's materialism and his understanding of the importance of the spiritual to the maintenance of the social order. In this, MacDiarmid

[130] Luciano Pellicani, *Gramsci: An Alternative Communism?* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), p. 32.
[131] *CP1*, p. 361 ('The Oon Olympian').
[132] *CP1*, p. 355; *CP2*, p. 1304 ('Art and the Workers').

remains true to Lenin's exhortation that the communist should assimilate bourgeois Christian culture as a means to transform the capitalist social order from which it originates and through which it prolongs its hegemony. Born just a year before MacDiarmid in 1891 in peasant rural Sardinia, Gramsci shared with the poet an early enthusiasm for Mussolini. Both fascism and communism are mass movements that yet rely on the theoretical formations of an elite of intellectuals for their effective function. Gramsci considered the masses and the intellectuals to be indissolubly linked and that any understanding of mass consciousness could only come through an examination of the intellectual classes. This suggests that the masses are controlled, perhaps indeed created as such, through the dominance of the ruling intelligentsia.

The appeal of authoritarian political movements to the cultural intelligentsia of modernism becomes clearer: artists and intellectuals, marginalized by the secularizing process of industrialization, seek to compensate by a reassertion of their former priestly power through leadership of absolutist political organizations. The 'clerks', in Julien Benda's disapproving words, become 'the spiritual militia of the material'.[133] The modernist desire to demote the intellectual acumen of the many in order to create a separate and superior authoritative intelligentsia has postmodern resonance in a highly politicized and often deliberately abstruse academic project. Despite his desire for an intelligentsia in Scotland that could raise the nation's cultural standards in line with the internationalist critical dicta of the Scottish Renaissance movement, MacDiarmid was suspicious of the professionalization of literature and the bourgeois 'culture class' – with 'Its intellectual poverty thinly coated / By a veneer of artistic sophistication' – which capitalism throws up.[134] The dualistic split in Scottish institutionalism between political and civil society – what Chris Harvie calls 'a two-

[133] Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, p. 75.
[134] *CP1*, p. 636 ('To the Younger Scottish Writers').

part model' – emerging from the Union and the British focus of the Scottish Enlightenment, increases MacDiarmid's distrust of the Scottish 'interpreting class'.[135] Refusing to take political control of the nation, these 'middlebrows' – 'ministers, bankers, school-teachers, business men, and what not' – administer the reputedly independent Scottish civil society with a 'small-n-nationalism' which may actually facilitate English metropolitan State rule.[136]

The Interpreting Class

MacDiarmid took his concept of the interpreting class from John Buchan's autobiography *Memory Hold-the-Door* (1940), published in the year of the author's death. Describing the 'intellectual atmosphere' of the immediate aftermath of World War One, Buchan contrasts the search for peace and privacy of 'plain folk everywhere', who were attempting 'sturdily to rebuild their world', with the ideological emptiness of the intellectuals:

> the interpreting class, which Coleridge called the 'clerisy', the people who should have influenced opinion, ran round their cages in vigorous pursuit of their tails. If they were futile they were also arrogant, and it was an odd kind of arrogance, for they had no creed to preach. The same type before the War had prostrated themselves in gaping admiration of the advance of physical science and the improvements in the material apparatus of life. There was little of that left. The War had shown that our mastery over physical forces might end in a nightmare, that mankind was becoming like an overgrown child armed with deadly weapons, a child with immense limbs and a tiny head. But this belated enlightenment seemed to drain their vitality. Just as many of the boys then leaving school, who had escaped war service, suffered from a kind of *accidie* and were inclined to look for 'soft options' in life, so the interpreting class plumed themselves wearily on being hollow men living in a waste land.[137]

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[135] Christopher Harvie, *Scotland: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 228; *A*, p. 232 ('Burns Today and Tomorrow').
[136] Harvie, *Scotland: A Short History*, p. 188; *A*, p. 232.
[137] John Buchan, *Memory Hold-the-Door* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), pp. 183-4.

Scathing of 'those who called themselves intellectuals' at this period of incipient modernism, Buchan denounces the cultural elite for having 'no absolute values' and 'being by profession atomisers, engaged in reducing the laborious structure of civilised life to a whirling nebula'.[138]

Buchan's paternalistic portrayal of the intellectual interpreting class as being youthfully ineffectual in the face of the adult task of rebuilding a civilization battered by war suggests something of the incomprehensibility of the generation gap, as if Lord Tweedsmuir, forty-seven when 'The Waste Land' was published in 1922, was no longer prepared to attempt the assimilation of shifts in cultural patterns. Buchan's obvious distaste for the postwar intelligentsia has firmer roots in the failure of leadership that he ascribes to them. Instead of pointing the masses in the direction of civilization's regeneration, the hollow men of the twenties were too busy examining the ruins of their own intellectual value system. Unwilling to incriminate themselves in the desecration of civilized values – as the proprietors of culture, this would be to burn down their own house – the intelligentsia look for an Other to accuse: perhaps the Jews, certainly the masses. A statesman *manqué*, the literary intellectual Buchan is censuring his own type, albeit of a new generation, with a dereliction of intellectual duty in their failure to lead the masses.

Unlike Buchan, MacDiarmid's objection to the interpreting class lies not in their failure of intellectual leadership, but that they have too much influence on the shaping of culture, particularly that doled out to the workers. MacDiarmid agrees with T.S. Eliot in his preference for an unlettered audience for his poetry rather than a literate middle-class readership: 'I would far sooner address an uneducated audience than an educated one'.[139] For the Scottish poet, the 'educated classes' are incapable of

[138] Buchan, *Memory Hold-the-Door*, p. 184.
[139] *LP*, p. 350.

understanding and welcoming fresh ideas, having already reached an intellectual 'saturation level' that is detrimental to themselves and the masses they affect to culturally enlighten:

> Alas! The thought of ninety-nine per cent of our people
> Is still ruled by Plato and Aristotle
> Read in an historical vacuum by the few
> From whom the masses receive
> A minimum of it but along with that
> A maximum incapacity for anything else.[140]

According to MacDiarmid, the limitations of vision of the interpreting class may not rest entirely with themselves as individuals but rather in the 'planned indoctrination to which they have been subjected' as a class, trained by a capitalist education for their supervisory, middle management role in the economy.[141] Being the intellectuals entrusted with the smooth running of capitalist civil society 'has practically insulated them from any mental activity altogether' other than the exercising of 'their conceit as "educated persons"' and 'their professional jealousy'.[142]

MacDiarmid's notion that the middle-class intelligentsia are neither interested in nor capable of engaging with new and radical ideas that may be challenging to the social and political order because they are that order's administrators, trained to ensure its efficient operation and, as such, do not constitute a true or free intelligentsia, is echoed in the work of Noam Chomsky. For Chomsky, 'the intellectual elite is the most heavily indoctrinated sector' of society.[143] As the 'secular priesthood' of the capitalist political order, Chomsky's intellectuals must believe that the ideological apparatus they promote is true, since without this conviction these 'guardians of the faith' could hardly be its convincing exponents.[144] Chomsky believes that 'this consensus of

[140] *LP*, p. 349; *CP1*, p. 662 ('The Gaelic Muse').
[141] *LP*, p. 349.
[142] *LP*, pp. 349-50.
[143] Noam Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader*, ed. James Peck (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995; 1988), p. 35.
[144] Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader*, p. 35.

intellectuals', created through capitalist educational indoctrination, represents the end of ideology.[145] If intellectuals are no longer free to reject the capitalist faith then they have abdicated their responsibility 'in the creation and analysis of ideology' for the security and prestige of professional status.[146] This lucrative and monopolizing process of professionalization purposefully marks off the intellectuals from the public as experts, correct in advance of debate, free to govern in the absence of true democracy. Both Chomsky and the socialist MacDiarmid put more faith in the non-professional intellectuality of ordinary people to receive new ideas than in the arrogant omniscience of an interpreting class who stand between them and political facts or cultural access:

> Let us believe in the intelligence and decency
> Of the majority of men if properly treated
> And their power when a great opportunity
> Is frankly presented to rise and meet it,
> And abjure the impious nonentities who still,
> As hitherto, would fain impersonate God's will.[147]

For MacDiarmid, it is of course culture that is of prime interest – however intimately poetry and politics are linked in his work – and 'From this point of view the professional classes in Scotland to-day are utterly hopeless compared with the working class'.[148] As discussed in the previous chapter, MacDiarmid had particular problems with what he perceived to be the anti-creative agenda of the teaching profession. However, MacDiarmid recognizes other communication outlets as being part of the capitalist education process, not just schools and universities. In this he includes 'the majority of public platforms (especially the religious and political ones), the radio, TV, the cinema, and of course the press' as being detrimental to autonomous thinking.[149] Such 'public platforms' are means through which the interpreting class

[145] Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader*, p. 73.
[146] Ibid., p. 72.
[147] *CP1*, pp. 395-6 ('The Belly-Grip').
[148] *LP*, p. 350.
[149] *RT3*, p. 301 ('To Hell with Culture').

can propagate a capitalist culture that 'does most harm to the broad masses of the people' by stultifying their ability to challenge a hierarchical social order that is ubiquitously presented as natural.[150] This culture of the educated that is so deleterious to the mass is exclusively concerned with getting on in the world, not acquiring the spiritual wisdom possessed by the self-elected Elect that would break the cycle of sordid materialism. MacDiarmid wishes such culture to hell.

MacDiarmid presented these thoughts in a speech of 1953 to the Porch Philosophical Club in Edinburgh under the title 'To Hell with Culture'.[151] The title and many of the ideas of MacDiarmid's piece are surely borrowed from Herbert Read's essay of the same name. Read's book *To Hell with Culture*, essays on the complicated interactions between the artist and society, appeared in 1963, but the article to which MacDiarmid owes inspiration was written under pressure of war in 1941. Read's socialistic thesis is that it is only under a decadent political order that 'culture' exists as something identifiably different from the other activities of life. The separation of culture from the fabric of existence in a natural political order, becoming a commodity that acts as a spiritual palliative for life in a decadent social order, Read lays at the door of the Romans. 'The cultured Greeks', he claims, 'had no word for culture'; for them, 'culture was a way of life itself'.[152] It was the Romans, 'the first large-scale capitalists in Europe', who commodified and hence invented 'culture'.[153] Read wants to do away the 'immense veneer' of capitalist culture that attempts to hide 'the cheapness and shoddiness at the heart of things'.[154] A 'democratic revolution' would

[150] *RT3*, p. 301 ('To Hell with Culture').
[151] See *RT3*, pp. 298-304.
[152] Herbert Read, *To Hell with Culture, and Other Essays on Art and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 10.
[153] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, p. 10.
[154] Ibid., p. 30.

eradicate 'the fake culture of our present civilization', consigning 'culture' to the past: 'the future will not be conscious of its culture'.[155]

MacDiarmid likewise believes that 'Culture and civilisation are all lies, and museums and furniture just dustcatchers'.[156] But if he agreed with Read's disapproval of capitalist culture it is less sure that MacDiarmid's Romantic notion of authorship would accede to Read's complimentary statement: 'To hell with the artist'.[157] For MacDiarmid, it is only the artist of genius who can transcend a capitalist culture that seeks to stifle his transformational vision while promoting mere talent at his expense: 'It isn't culture that is needed now. It is something very different – to which culture is generally implacably opposed, just as "the good is the enemy of the best". I mean genius.'[158] Culture is a decorative guise of the middle class, a group that approves of the restrained professionalism of the talented. In a capitalist era awash with the businesslike proficiency of the interpreting class, it is genius that is required to speak to humanity rather than a narrow culture class. In the binary of art and industry, spirit and matter, art becomes what Alan Sinfield calls the bourgeois 'conscience of capitalism', with the interpreting class as cultural schizophrenes divided between the prophet and the professional.[159] The spiritual communist MacDiarmid strives for a synthetical art integrated and total, without the smallest rent in this dialectical seamless garment through which the interpreting class can win through.

MacDiarmid's scathing analysis of the interpreting class arises from his loathing of a Scottish middle class that helps actuate the bourgeois anglification provincializing the nation. MacDiarmid's most concerted critical effort to remould national opinion, to create a place for his cultural politics, came through the pages of the teachers' *Scottish*

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[155] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, pp. 30, 26, 13.
[156] *RT3*, p. 300 ('To Hell with Culture').
[157] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, p. 23.
[158] *RT3*, p. 303 ('To Hell with Culture').
[159] Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, pp. 28-9.

Educational Journal, collected as *Contemporary Scottish Studies* (1926). This was to take the battle directly into the enemy camp, the philistine home of Scotland's most influential body of the interpreting class. With *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, MacDiarmid attempts the reorientation of Scottish culture away from the provincial and populist values of the kailyard towards the modernist internationalism of the Scottish Renaissance, an artistic movement as conceived by MacDiarmid in Montrose that could not exist without a corresponding theorization of the national culture and its place in the international political schema. In line with such thinking, writing of the immense popularity enjoyed by John Buchan, MacDiarmid hopes 'that his aim shall be not to reach that wider public but the small one which matters infinitely more'.[160]

Contemporary Scottish Studies is as conspicuous an example of canon formation as that conducted by Eliot, but one that goes deeper than the assertion of a particular set of literary values to a preference for a specific national type. MacDiarmid contrasts the 'Men', those of unique artistic individualism such as Norman Douglas, R.B. Cunninghame Graham, J.D. Fergusson and Samuel Peploe, with the 'Mob', the popularizers who lack artistic and intellectual worth, like Annie S. Swan and Gilbert Rae. According to 'the nature of things' in the market system, the 'Mob' type will 'always immensely outnumber' the 'Men'.[161] However, 'due to the cultural consequences of the existing political relationship between Scotland and England', the triumph of the populizers over the true artist is greatly exacerbated.[162] Rather than reformulating a separate Scottish tradition through which their work could find its canonical place, the popularizers write for a larger, more lucrative British market. The political agenda of the type that is MacDiarmid's notion of the real Scottish artist is the highbrow male who sees art as a cultural and political mission to internationalize

[160] *CSS*, p. 12 ('John Buchan').
[161] *CSS*, p. 36 ('R.B. Cunninghame Graham').
[162] *CSS*, p. 37.

Scotland – someone very like MacDiarmid himself. In the absence of this type, 'Scottish life is deprived of its natural self-corrective'.[163] This highly illuminating phrase suggests that MacDiarmid sees the Scottish artist's role as involving the teacherly amendation of errors of political judgement and cultural taste committed by the Scottish public. He wishes the 'Men' to save the masses from themselves, the 'Mob'.

MacDiarmid extends his personalized scrutiny of the Scottish psyche in *Scottish Eccentrics* (1936). Writing from the marginality of Whalsay, a place eccentric to the cultural and political concerns of metropolitan Britain, MacDiarmid continues his search for the true Scottish identity. He chooses his eccentrics from all classes of the nation, but through them illustrates his disdain for the middle-class mediocrity that finds its comfortable home in the neuk of Anglo-Scottishness. MacDiarmid's eccentrics confound the expectations of the purse-proud, canny Scots of bourgeois Scottish Unionism with their utter disregard for the rules of provincial normalcy. They are not too feart to be fools in the face of the disapproval of popular opinion and so they gull a public wrapped in the confines of monetary reason. As he says of the 'extravagances' of Sir Thomas Urquhart's style – amongst many talents that would appeal to MacDiarmid in search of eccentrics, the translator of *Rabelais* – 'This is not the sort of thing that appeals to the man in the street, and in these democratic days Urquhart is an insult to common sense'.[164] MacDiarmid claims that their own literature and history are as 'unintelligible' to the majority of Scots as contemporary science and modernist art because 'Their constant appeal is to common sense in the lowest sense of the term'.[165]

[163] *CSS*, p. 37 ('R.B. Cunninghame Graham').
[164] *SE*, pp. 27, 28.
[165] *SE*, p. 303.

With their superfluity of eccentric creativeness, MacDiarmid's real Scots tauntingly expose the anti-creative, materialist common sense of contemporary middle-class Anglo-Scots. With an ill-noted wicked sense of humour, the poet fancifully writes 'of the Rev. Robert Kirk, M.A., who was kidnapped by elves for betraying the secrets of the polity of their commonwealth', in order to introduce the extremes of the imagination to a national scene stifled by the philistine mediocrity of the interpreting class of religion and education.[166] In his insightful essay on William McGonagall, MacDiarmid lambasts the lowering democratic spirit pervading Scottish life that allowed for the 'brutal baiting' of a man of clearly impaired mental faculties.[167] McGonagall is the bastard twin of true creativity who enables the masses to laugh at poetry as a mere fancy of the mad, while they display the same 'incurable illiteracy, the inaccessibility to the least enlightenment' that is reflected in the face of the deranged poet.[168]

For MacDiarmid, neither McGonagall nor his mocking public are to blame for their lamentable ignorance, but rather the social and political order that ensures that 'the attentions of the people are carefully kept in certain directions'.[169] Social control of the potentially revolutionary masses is the root of the interpreting class's power in capitalist cultural politics: 'A nation of football spectators and picture-house fans is far more easily controlled than would be one with a like passion for being *au fait* with science and speculative ideas.'[170] With elect irony, a futuristic MacDiarmid imagines Ibrox Park, home of Glasgow Rangers Football Club, 'packed tight' to listen to

> a debate on 'la loi de l'effort converti'
> Between Professor MacFadyen and a Spainish pairty.[171]

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[166] *SE*, p. 313.
[167] *SE*, p. 70.
[168] Ibid.
[169] *SE*, p. 265.
[170] Ibid.
[171] *CP2*, p. 1039 ('Glasgow, 1960').

However, with capitalist entertainment to sap their mental energy after a day spent working to make others wealthy, the majority have little encouragement to interest themselves in the intellectual revolutions of modern science that MacDiarmid believes will free them from servitude. 'The consequence is that the twentieth century is still populated (save for an infinitesimal minority) by Neolithic Man.'[172] Ascribing his own spiritual communism to another of his eccentrics, the philosopher Thomas Davidson, MacDiarmid argues that 'He stood for the highest culture for the breadwinners, for the people who have to "go to work" early'.[173] Enculturation of the working class 'will give them an intelligent view of the world', synchronously disempowering the interpreting class of its politically retarding cultural influence.[174]

MacDiarmid understands that it is in the interests of their continued class rule that the bourgeois interpreting class should mediate between the workers and high culture. Indeed, it is the professional cultural brokers who help create the artificial academic divisions between the high culture of the educated few and the mass culture suitable for the ignorant many. For Alan Swingewood, mass culture is a myth that is necessary for the continued functioning of capitalist exploitation. The duality of high and mass culture survives on the specialization inherent in global capitalism's division of labour to which the autodidact MacDiarmid opposes the generalism of the Scottish democratic intellect. Swingewood believes that it was the aspirational middle class with their disposable incomes who demanded an entertaining popular culture. The 'threat to high culture' perceived by many modernists 'stems not from the working class but from the social strata who, through voting habits, styles of life and ideological assumptions share uncritically in the values of capitalism'.[175] Many modernist writers were the middle-class beneficiaries of such values, yet were not

[172] *SE*, p. 265.
[173] *SE*, p. 145.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Swingewood, *The Myth of Mass Culture*, p. 107.

enthusiastic about losing their power as the interpreting class through uncritical slippage into the dreaded realms of the popular.

Such contradictions characterize modernist writing, ensuring for Lawrence Rainey that it is 'neither a straightforward resistance nor an outright capitulation to commodification but a momentary equivocation that incorporates elements of both in a brief, necessarily unstable synthesis'.[176] This same 'unstable synthesis' of radicalism and reaction is evident in an academic project that is informed by modernism. The linguistic difficulty of much modernist writing in the early twentieth century, its literary allusiveness and deliberate appeal to the educated few, is reminiscent of professional academic studies at the dawn of a new century. Yet the minority discourse of academia is explicitly written to remould the politics and culture of the mass, obscurantism with a radical social mission that 'seeks to subordinate literature to ideology', according to Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* (1990).[177] Kimball follows Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) in proposing that 1960s radicalism has become institutionalized to the detriment of higher education: 'the intellectual minority expected to enhance its status, presenting itself as the defender and spokesman of all the others'.[178]

For Thomas Strychacz, modernism 'was shaped profoundly by a convergence of professional discourse and the rise of mass culture'.[179] Both modernism and academia tangle confusedly with mass society, the growth of which accentuates the perception of their elitist specialism, yet neither truly understands or connects with this shadowy Other as this would require a thorough investigation of the material roots of their own

[176] Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 3.
[177] Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (New York: Harper Row, 1990), p. 15.
[178] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 31.
[179] Thomas Strychacz, *Modernism, Mass Culture and Professionalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 5.

mutually beneficial cultural domination. If the creator of high culture requires the legitimizing power of the professional critic to ensure canonical stature, then both the intellectual and artist need the university as an institutional barrier defending their cultural hegemony from the uneducated masses. This 'dual process' allows many artists and intellectuals to live comfortably inside the power system created by knowledge, which their specialized hegemony prioritizes, whilst also allowing them to believe they stand rebelliously opposed to the economic relations of capitalism through the apparently marginal nature of their vocation.[180]

Such a contradictory position is aptly characterized by Robert Crawford as belonging to the modern poet. Crawford finds the roots of poetry's uneasy alliance with academia in the imperialistic dualities of the Scottish Enlightenment, a movement 'so conscious of divisions and connections between the primitive and the civilized'.[181] Crawford accepts that under the conditions of modernity – from the Enlightenment of the 1750s to the postmodern present – poetry and academia have become 'deeply intertwined'.[182] As such, Crawford's modern poet is at once barbarian and sophisticate, prophet and professor, pushing the bounds of rational knowledge through university research, whilst challenging the institutional monopolization of this knowledge as the visionary poet. Crawford argues that MacDiarmid's later poetry, by 'Colluding or flyting with academia', establishes this autodidact as 'a poetic wildman who was also author of a poetry of knowledge'.[183] It is MacDiarmid's late, learned, epical poetry of 'chopped-up prose' that Crawford suggests 'anticipates and articulates' the development of the computer.[184] MacDiarmid's almost obsessive linking of his poetry, particularly from the thirties in Whalsay onwards, with the latest

[180] Konrád and Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, p. 28.
[181] Robert Crawford, *The Modern Poet: Poetry, Academia, and Knowledge since the 1750s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 8.
[182] Crawford, *The Modern Poet*, p. 19.
[183] Ibid., p. 206.
[184] *CP2*, p. 1052 ('The Caledonian Antisyzygy'); Crawford, *The Modern Poet*, p. 216.

discoveries of science and technology gives ample scope for Crawford's idea that 'MacDiarmid's verse is enthusiastically cybernetic'.[185] However, it would perhaps be better to describe MacDiarmid's poetry of generalist knowledge as being avidly revolutionary.

In the accurate establishment of cultural history, it would be impossible not to intimately link MacDiarmid's poetry of knowledge with his communism. As we have seen, the poet follows Lenin's credo that the communist must know everything in order to have the ability and authority to direct the future. MacDiarmid excitedly assumes that the scientific knowledge of the present is sufficient to release the masses from economic subjugation and that it is the imperative of the communist poet to culturally communicate the potential evolutionary importance of the paradigm shift from spiritual to material concerns. A revolutionary change in the political order is essential if the fruits of such technological development as mass computerization are to be socially progressive. However, under market conditions, the Internet that Crawford equates with MacDiarmid's later work has become part of the trash culture of capitalism that his poetry of knowledge was written to combat. Pornography gains many more hits on the Net than any other subject, certainly than poetry, and the Net has so far failed to become the postmodern computerized knowledge-resource equivalent of the totalizing project of the encyclopedists of Enlightenment Edinburgh. Similarly, as with high culture under capitalism, access to computer literacy, whilst appearing to be all-pervasive, is relatively restricted, with those of the Western professional class benefiting most on a quotidian occupational basis.

The Modern Poet (2001) assumes the professionalization of literature to be inevitable, yet fails sufficiently to assign this process to the tightening commodification sparked by industrialization and continuing under global capitalism.

[185] Crawford, *The Modern Poet*, p. 217.

By tracing the contradictions inherent in the position of the modern poet to the dualistic Scottish Enlightenment rather than the broader dialectical workings of capitalism Crawford's gentrification of ideas particularizes literature, marking it off as different from other areas of life and work affected by the same process. The contemporary poet-professor may be barbarian, but such dilettantish radicalism is safely reserved for the page, to be read by the middle-class sophisticates of the professional interpreting class who form the modern poet's audience.

The congenital contradictions of capitalism are evident in the history of the intellectual class. For Karl Mannheim, 'The crux and turning point in Western history is the gradual dissolution of the compact caste-like strata. The scholar was the first to be affected by this shift'.[186] The declassing involved in the transformation from feudalistic priestly caste to selling their ideological wares in the marketplace of modern capitalism generates a conflict between the transcendental, universalistic ('generic') mission of the intellectual and the political and social ('genetic') ends that seek to circumscribe this, a clash between timeless spirit and historical matter which, according to Konrád and Szelényi, is fundamental to the artist and intellectual of capitalist culture:

> Often the schizophrenia inherent in the intellectual's role is apparent in one and the same individual. The greatest of them incorporate the contradictions between their generic and genetic roles into the antinomies of their thought – which does not by any means prove that their thinking is inconsistent.[187]

As pointed out in the Introduction to this thesis, this is an apt description of the difficulties of reconciliation at the heart of MacDiarmid's radical Scottish Republican politics of place: his marxist elitism relies on an attempt to adhere to a modernist conception of high culture which the poet wishes to be available to the working class

[186] Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992; 1956), p. 117.
[187] Konrád and Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, pp. 22-3.

by cutting out the middleman of the interpreting class; yet he also derides the intellectual level of the masses, local and universal, believing in their authoritarian leadership by a highbrow elite. 'I am consumed with love for the people I detest' says the marxist MacDiarmid of the Glasgow 'keelies'.[188] Such individual contradictions illustrate MacDiarmid's dialectical struggle with the consuming forces, the 'short circuiters o' consciousness', of capitalism.[189]

The Short-Circuiters of Consciousness

MacDiarmid's disdain for the cultural interpreting class of capitalism derives from his belief in the power of knowledge to effect social change. It is the task of the freethinking intellectual to stimulate the process of spiritual evolution, not to stand in the way of material emancipation by serving the class interests of capitalist culture:

> all that seeks to evade the stereotyped and to prevent the short-circuiting of human consciousness is in the interests of the people, and safeguards their inheritance, while all that 'keeps people in their place', that prophesies easy things for them, life without tears, all that simplifies for their dull wits, all that talks down to them, all that assumes that the heights are not for them, but only for such-and-such, are the shibboleths of their enemies[190]

MacDiarmid dismisses capitalist democracy as sham, believing its marketing of mass culture to be a means of politically disenfranchising potentially revolutionary and creative individuals. His anti-liberalism denounces capitalism's ability to 'legitimize conflicts of interest' as Konrád and Szelényi put it, neutering dissent by absorbing it into the body politic, even rewarding those of the intellectual interpreting class who analyse its inner workings with professional promotion:

> But of second-rates we've a rich array –
> The men who do the super-donkey work,

[188] *CP2*, pp. 1337, 1333 ('Glasgow').
[189] *CP1*, p. 508 ('Ode to All Rebels').
[190] *LP*, pp. 236-7.

> The slave-drivers, the factors for the rulers, –
> And hordes of expert parasites,
> Sinecure-holders and mob-befoolers.[191]

Disdainful of the capitalist interpreting class, but in keeping with the elitism of his spiritual communism, MacDiarmid believes that marxist intellectuals such as himself will direct the masses to a new order. Similarly, according to the nationalist poet, the principles of the Scottish Renaissance movement are 'a disbelief in the value of popular discussion, a repudiation of democratic principle, and the conviction that an "adequate minority" can "seize power" '.[192]

The authoritarianism of MacDiarmid's Dr Stockmann-like belief in an intellectual minority that is always right springs from his conviction that the majority under capitalist education and culture are so ill-served by the 'parasitical "interpreting class"' as to be rendered almost incapable of decision.[193] The popularizing proponents of mass entertainment 'are the enemies of the people' – recalling the 'Victorian' progressivism of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882) – whom it pays, both financially and in cultural and political power, to pander to what they want to believe is mass taste.[194] However, it is a taste that this educated class creates in order to sell entertainment to a now homogenized bloc. It is in the interests of the interpreting class to strip the masses of their individuality so that by '"keeping the people in their place", stereotyping their stupidity' they can be better fitted to the mechanized role of a working class.[195] For MacDiarmid, a genuine culture is produced by individuals and its effect is spiritually and intellectually individualizing and, potentially, politically liberating: 'The interests of poetry are diametrically opposed to whatever may be

[191] Konrád and Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, p. 33; *CP2*, p. 1286 ('Ode for the 350th Anniversary of Edinburgh University').
[192] *RT2*, p. 278 ('Whither Scotland?').
[193] *RT2*, p. 485 ('Problems of Poetry Today').
[194] *RT2*, p. 486.
[195] Ibid.

making for any robotisation or standardisation of humanity or any short-circuiting of human consciousness.'[196]

MacDiarmid's conception of high art as a bulwark against the homogenizing forces of consumer capitalism is suggestive of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, in particular Theodor Adorno's work on the culture industry. For Adorno, the mass culture created by capitalism is totalitarian in essence and action, designed and controlled from above to regulate the leisure time of the masses just as completely as the division of labour governs their working day. Only high art can sneak through the small gaps in the oppressive capitalist whole created by the instrumental rationality of the Enlightenment. The very autonomy of such art from ideology or system, the modernist elitism that renders it inexplicable to the masses and keeps it the cultural capital of the educated few, is precisely wherein lies its revolutionary potential. However, under capitalist conditions, the revolutionary promise of a united working class is ignominiously simulated in their alienated mass participation in the lure of the culture industry: 'They become a collective through the adaptation to an over-mastering arbitrary power.'[197] Unlike much postmodern theory, which allows the consumer a measure of self-conscious and ironical independence from the machinations of the market, Adorno's totalizing marxian modernism proposes that the individual is powerless, the 'customer is not king':

> The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above. To the detriment of both it forces together the spheres of high and low art, separated for thousands of years. The seriousness of high art is destroyed in speculation about its efficacy; the seriousness of the lower perishes with the civilizational constraints imposed on the rebellious resistance inherent within it as long as social control was not yet total. Thus, although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary,

[196] *RT2*, p. 486 ('Problems of Poetry Today').
[197] T.W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London & New York: Routledge, 2001; 1991), p. 95.

> but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery.[198]

It is debatable that high and low art are divorced in a Scottish culture that creatively marries the literary and the demotic in the work of Henryson, Burns, Hogg, Grassic Gibbon and Kelman, for instance. As Alexander Broadie states, 'the classification of Scottish culture' into "high" and "popular" is problematic in its application'.[199] However, ever the intellectual aristo, the marxist MacDiarmid courts unpopularity, championing what he calls the 'Dominant Minority'.[200] The self-elected Elect poet opposes the hegemony of a culture industry in which Everyman assumes Herbert Marcuse's one-dimensionality, thus losing individuality through capitalism's 'integration of opposites':

> At the most advanced stage of capitalism, this society is a system of subdued pluralism, in which the competing institutions concur in solidifying the power of the whole over the individual.[201]

Writing in 1968, high watermark of postmodern pop art – 'or, as I call it, anti-art' (according to the MacDiarmid of *The Kind of Company I've Kept*, also published in the sixties) – and student protest, MacDiarmid fully exhibits his own elitist marxism:

> As Professor Herbert Marcuse of California has said recently the reason for the student revolt is that it is impossible to get through the barrier constituted by the vast majority of mankind hopelessly brain-washed [*sic*] and manipulated by the great mass media and unable to think for themselves. This throws a greater responsibility than ever on the educated. The problem, as Antonio Gramsci the great Italian Marxist theoretician said, is a problem of consciousness.[202]

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[198] Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, pp. 99, 98-9.
[199] Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), p. 14.
[200] *CP2*, p. 1030 ('The Kind of Poetry I Want').
[201] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. xii, 50.
[202] *Company*, p. 78; MacDiarmid, 'Introduction', Oliver Brown, *Witdom: Essaygrams – an extension of 'The Extended Tongue'* (Glasgow: Piper Books, 1969; 1953), pp. 7-8.

Opposing the dumbing down basic to capitalist mass culture, MacDiarmid believes consciousness can be expanded, not through the drugs of sixties counter-culture, but by 'A learned poetry wholly free / From the brutal love of ignorance'.[203]

As pointed out by Alan Swingewood, the defeated marxism of Adorno and Marcuse is reminiscent of the cultural elitism of F.R. Leavis – who cheerfully admits that 'culture has always been in minority keeping' – in the paranoid conspiracy theory that high culture is under threat, not just from the mechanization of advanced industrialism, but the capitalist designs of those in control of the media and entertainment industry.[204] Despite, or because of, his only concerted period of paid employment being his decade as a journalist in Montrose, MacDiarmid had difficulties believing in the 'freedom of the press', claiming that under capitalism 'that only means permitting a group of newspaper owners to undo public education and debauch popular taste'.[205] In the interests of increased standards, 'An authoritarian position must be (and will be, since the preservation, let alone the furtherance, of civilisation depends upon it) re-established'.[206] Written in 1933 by the communist poet, this suggested State-control of the press eerily foreshadows the propaganda of the forthcoming World War, the Orwellian Newspeak of *1984*, and even the political spin of the postmodern present. However, the democratic objections to such a position seem little to trouble MacDiarmid as long as the 'Problems of Poetry Today' are solved.

A more realistic, yet related, grievance centres on the 'vested interests' of the Scottish press in relation to the Union.[207] MacDiarmid exposes the anti-nationalist bias

[203] *CP2*, p. 1030 ('The Kind of Poetry I Want').
[204] F.R. Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (St. John's College, Cambridge: The Minority Press, 1930), p. 3; see also Swingewood, *The Myth of Mass Culture*, Ch. 1: 'The Theory of Mass Society'.
[205] *RT2*, p. 487 ('Problems of Poetry Today').
[206] Ibid.
[207] *RT2*, p. 14 ('Scotland and the Banking System').

of Scottish newspapers, maintaining that the symbiosis of the money monopoly and Unionism precludes the possibility of a free Scottish Press:

> All the Scottish papers aver that the demand for Scottish nationalism is made by a 'handful of fanatics', and has no real weight of 'public opinion' behind it – but what is 'public opinion', and how far is it reflected by a Press which, in a country which has always been overwhelmingly radical and republican, and where today a third of the entire electorate vote Socialist, is solidly anti-Socialist.[208]

For a wishful thinking red MacDiarmid, the press in Scotland betray their true function of furthering national debate and analysis through the black propaganda inherent in their relation to supposedly wider British interests. Instead of fighting Scotland's corner, newspaper owners and editors neglect Scottish opinion for greater economic gain:

> There were twa Robert Bruces.
> Ane edited 'The Glasgow Herald.'
> The ither focht for Scotland
> When it was *less* imperilled.[209]

MacDiarmid is no less scathing of the 'Philistine dictatorship' at the BBC, particularly under the control of the Scottish Sir John Reith, 'the last man in the world to be entrusted with anything cultural'.[210] Bemoaning in 1931 the 'absence of competent and responsible control' of Scottish media by Scots, only a year later MacDiarmid realises that the root of the problem goes deeper than individuals like Reith.[211] Control of mass communication, such as newspapers and the BBC, by a self-interested interpreting class is fundamental to the continuance of bourgeois culture and the British class system; one has only to consider 'the BBC personnel – a snobbish set of young English Public School or University people, or Anglo-Scots of the same

[208] *RT2*, pp. 14-15 ('Scotland and the Banking System').
[209] *CP1*, p. 264 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[210] *RT2*, p. 400 ('Mr Pooh Bah').
[211] *RT2*, p. 281 ('Whither Scotland?').

kidney, thoroughly unrepresentative of the great sections of BBC patrons' – to understand how this domination of class and nation is implemented.[212] For Jean Baudrillard, in postmodernity 'The media are not *co-efficients*, but *effectors* of ideology'.[213] Disaffected by the deliberate short-circuiting of consciousness that passes for democracy in capitalist public communication mediums, MacDiarmid enacts an intellectual and linguistic revolutionary dictatorship of his own.

With *In Memoriam James Joyce* MacDiarmid finally institutes the kind of poetry he wants. Lengthy, highbrow, materialist, this is a nationalist poem committed to 'difficult knowledge', and an internationalist's poetic paean to the diversity of national cultures and languages.[214] It is a postmodern poem in praise of a variety of specificities. It is elitist in its sheer length, being impossible to assimilate in anything like one reading. MacDiarmid was drawn to the writing of long poems in part because they would be 'far too long / To be practicable for any existing medium' and would therefore have only a limited but extremely literate audience.[215] The poem's elitism extends to its insistence on the importance of knowledge to spiritual and political emancipation, yet the facts that it catalogues are so abstruse as to render their liberatory possibilities negligible to all but the educated few. However, it is democratic in its only partially successful presentation of linguistic diversity, attempting to break the imperialist hegemony of English and performing such a postcolonial task in a masterful English that only a provincial could command. Following in the tradition of the Scottish democratic intellect, this poem of generalist knowledge rejects the capitalistic specialism represented most cruelly in the division of labour – which favours the parasitical professional of the interpreting class – in favour of an autodidactic merging of media. Only partly addressed to Joyce, nonetheless his use as

[212] *RT2*, p. 400 ('Mr Pooh Bah').
[213] Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p. 169.
[214] *CP2*, p. 1013 ('The Kind of Poetry I Want').
[215] *LP*, p. 130.

a marker of artistic and ideological valour indicates MacDiarmid's position: the elitism of modernist high art uneasily converging with the revolutionary socialism of a postcolonial politics of place.

'How much knowledge of imaginative literature / Does it need to make a proper man?' asks this self-taught, self-appointed literary expert at the beginning of 'England is Our Enemy'.[216] More than that possessed by most of the rulers and the ruled, at any rate in philistine Anglo-Saxondom, would answer MacDiarmid's poet. He combines the elitism of the claim 'that in each 100,000 souls / Five are reasonably civilised' with the ideologically loaded observation that 'literature in Anglo-Saxondom / Has, after growing / More and more provincial, died' because the class-based culture of the English has torn literature from organic connection with the masses.[217] For the autodidactic Scottish Republican MacDiarmid, to be ignorant of the abundant glories of world literature is not to be fully human, just as to lack appreciation of the national culture is to be a denationalized provincial, 'that abominable thing, British'.[218] True internationalism is that which understands 'the separate glories' of individual nations, but equally recognizes the cultural indivisibility of

> works going together to make one whole,
> And each work being one stone
> In a gigantic and imperishable fabric.[219]

This poem of 'difficult intellectual pleasure' exemplifies the inseparable relationship between nationalism and internationalism in MacDiarmid's politics of place.[220] Like his fellow Celts, Yeats and Joyce, MacDiarmid is committed to a linguistically uncommon literature of difficult generalist knowledge that confutes the

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[216] *CP2*, p. 858 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[217] *CP2*, p. 862.
[218] *RT2*, p. 52 ('Backward *Forward*').
[219] *CP2*, p. 870 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[220] *CP2*, p. 751.

notion that political rule is founded on the cultural superiority of an Anglo-Saxondom that is purportedly 'richer, more numerous, / More civilised, more virtuous than the rest'.[221] Seeking to combat the linguistic monopoly wielded by English, the Scot somewhat fancifully claims 'There is no language in the world / That has not yielded me delight'.[222] Such elitist assertions, however fictitious in actuality, display MacDiarmid's nationalist allegiance to international cultural and linguistic diversity and concomitant national political sovereignty: 'A language is / A form of life; but there are many forms of life'.[223] For such nationalist multiplicity to find breath, however, the false internationalism of monoglot global capital that flattens cultural difference through its geographic and economic omneity – the McDonaldization of culture – must be stifled. In this capitalist mass culture, humans are 'cheaper than safety', the dignity of individual difference lost in a world

> Unconcerned about values,
> Indifferent to human quality
> Or jealous and implacably hostile to it[224]

For MacDiarmid, capitalism is no promise of variety and individual self-realization as its Americanized propaganda would have us believe, but rather imperialistically acts to short-circuit the consciousness of individual and national difference. MacDiarmid's marxian modernism opposes a capitalist culture in which 'Mechanical authoritarianism' has almost extinguished individuality and there is 'everywhere the worship of "efficiency" / Of whatever "works" no matter to what ends'.[225] In the face of such denial of difference, the Scottish poet's politics of place assert a 'particularity of vision':

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[221] *CP2*, p. 789 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[222] *CP2*, p. 818.
[223] *CP2*, p. 799.
[224] *CP2*, pp. 840, 840-1.
[225] *CP2*, p. 840.

Look! Here and there a pinguicula eloquent of the Alps
Still keeps a purple-blue flower
On the top of its straight and slender stem.
Bog-asphodel, deep-gold, and comely in form,
The queer, almost diabolical, sundew,
And when you leave the bog for the stag moors and the rocks
The parsley fern – a lovelier plant
Than even the proud Osmunda Regalis –
Flourishes in abundance
Showing off oddly contrasted fronds
From the cracks of the lichened stones.
It is pleasant to find the books
Describing it as 'very local.'
Here is a change indeed!
The universal *is* the particular.[226]

The visionary invocation to 'Look!' and see the incalculable and splendid variety of local nature is sharply distinguished from the 'speed-up, the "church work", the lead poisoning / The strain that drives men nuts' of a specialized industrial economy where a generalist 'Culture is slowly declining' and nations and individuals are blinded to their own singularity by global capitalism.[227]

In this ideological scheme of things 'It is unlikely that man will develop into anything higher'.[228] Just as certain animals that were unable to evolve have vanished for good, so too humans, already 'returning to barbarism', will also 'finally become extinct' unless they can develop a different form of society that prioritizes creativity and knowledge:

The ancestors of oysters and barnacles had heads.
Snakes have lost their limbs
And ostriches and penguins their power of flight.
Man may just as easily lose his intelligence.
Most of our people already have.[229]

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[226] *CP2*, p. 845 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[227] *CP2*, p. 840, 842.
[228] *CP2*, p. 842.
[229] Ibid.

Living in 'a world that is barely within / The limits of present human comprehension' to our short-circuited consciousness, what is needed is a Bergsonian creative evolutionary process merging the materialist findings of science with flashes of spiritual insight in a generalist poetry which confronts the contradictions of capitalism through 'the power of conscious reflection'.[230] MacDiarmid seeks a 'new species of man', humans who are 'intensely organized' and 'In proper balance with a society / Itself in proper ecological balance'.[231] MacDiarmid's 'songs are kandym in the Waste Land' of modern environmental disfigurement; his poetry will 'curse and strive to combat / The leper pearl of Capitalist culture' that renders barren all that it consumes:

> Capitalist culture to the great masses of mankind
> Is like the exploitative handling in America
> Of forest, grazing, and tilled lands
> Which exaggerates floods and reduces
> The dry-season flow of the rivers to almost nothing.[232]

Such holistic concern with the local environment indicates the global nature of MacDiarmid's politics of place and his wish to internationalize Scotland through wider concerns: 'Our ideal ethnological method / May be fairly called the ecological one'.[233] The mature marxist art, particularly *In Memoriam James Joyce*, is poetic prelude to a postmodern world in which industrialism threatens not only humanity's relation with itself, as possessed the nineteenth century, but with creation.

In this respect, MacDiarmid's poetry of generalist knowledge resembles Walter Benjamin's almost necessarily incomplete *magnum opus The Arcades Project.* If Benjamin's *Illuminations* (1955) sheds theoretical light on the cultural and material history that informs the modernism and mass culture of the early twentieth century, then *The Arcades Project* is his Herculean attempt to grapple with almost every aspect

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[230] *CP2*, pp. 836, 837 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[231] *CP2*, p. 837.
[232] *CP2*, pp. 1144, 1142 ('My Songs are Kandym in the Waste Land').
[233] *CP2*, p. 788 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).

of 'the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', Paris. For Benjamin, Paris is the centre of nineteenth-century civilization, the place where material development and cultural excellence collide in an imperial drama of poetry and progress. The arcades of Paris are important to Benjamin as a symbol of the optimism of capitalist invention and the ugly underside of bourgeois aspirations. Benjamin's methodology is not that of the conventional historian but rather, in keeping with his unorthodox subject, that of a modernist marxist with mystical inclinations.

Benjamin vastly outdoes even MacDiarmid in his magpie-like propensity for the collection of unattributed quotations: 'This work has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks.'[234] Combining this with the power of his personal insights, he builds a 'literary montage' that sheds a piercing sidelight on the cultural history of one of the great imperial powers of the nineteenth century.[235] Similar to the MacDiarmid of *In Memoriam James Joyce*, Benjamin lets these modernistic fragments speak cryptically for themselves: 'I needn't *say* anything. Merely show.'[236] As a marxist concerned 'to demonstrate a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress', Benjamin understands that the difficulty and fitfulness of such 'knowledge comes only in lightning flashes' that are almost spiritual in nature.[237] This is reflected in the unfinished, fragmentary nature of a composition dialectically struggling to unearth the cultural history of an era. Above all, Benjamin's 'method of composition' finds affinity in MacDiarmid's generalist poetry in its gargantuan, absolutist appetite for 'a vast panoply of

[234] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (London & Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002; 1999), p. 458.
[235] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 460.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid., pp. 460, 456.

knowledge'.[238] For Benjamin, 'everything one is thinking at a specific moment in time must at all costs be incorporated into the project then at hand'.[239]

MacDiarmid mirrors this in the dictionary dredging and newspaper scouring of his *Mature Art*, picking up information wherever he can find it. On the run from the evolutionary end game that is 'intellectual apathy', he wants

> A poetry fully alive to all the implications
> Of the fact that one of the great triumphs
> Of poetic insight was the way in which
> It prepared the minds of many
> For the conception of evolution[240]

Keen to give expression to the multitude of his own factual findings and poetic perceptions, MacDiarmid also embraces the postmodern inclusiveness of different language and knowledge systems as he attempts to straddle the barriers between East and West in a 'Language, / Accomplishing what it pleases, traversing all things'.[241] Imperialistic as this may sound, MacDiarmid knows that in finding one effective generalist method he can attempt to give a political voice to the many:

> No voice not fully enfranchised,
> No voice dispensable or undistinguishable
> Like a man who needs uses words from many dialects
> To say what he has to say as exactly and directly as possible.[242]

Like Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* in its elucidation of the buried cultural history of the nineteenth century, MacDiarmid's *In Memoriam James Joyce* does not 'say as exactly and directly as possible' what it has to say, the nature of this task being impossible except through the very fragmentary yet epical methods with which both men attempt it. MacDiarmid heroically aims at the portrayal of the paradigmatic shift

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[238] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 456; *CP2*, p. 825 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[239] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 456.
[240] *CP2*, pp. 1013, 1027 ('The Kind of Poetry I Want').
[241] *CP2*, p. 786 (*In Memoriam James Joyce*).
[242] *CP2*, pp. 786-7.

to a postmodern era only just beginning as he writes the poem. In this he rejects Benjamin's metropolitan obsession with Paris, the cultural centre of the nineteenth century, his radical Scottish Republican politics of place aiming at a more truly global vision of a world politically and imaginatively decentred through the loss of European imperial control.

Benjamin and MacDiarmid were born in the same year, just eight years from the end of a nineteenth century that the German was to look back on with mingled fascination and anachronistic disquiet. Dying at his own hands in 1940 before the full horror of the nightmare of history could engulf him, Benjamin did not live to witness a new imperialism of global capital that overruns ancient national barriers and renders obsolete the marxian dogmas of the thirties. *In Memoriam James Joyce* is MacDiarmid's endeavour to deal with this change and optimistically oppose the short-circuiting of consciousness that it brings in its wake. MacDiarmid does so with those most important of tools at his command, the poet's cascade of words instituting his 'Vision of a World Language' that informs an international politics of place rejecting the imperialism of a capitalist new world order.

The evolution in MacDiarmid's thinking from the wilful irrationalism of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, through the spiritual communism of the 'Hymns to Lenin', to the generalist knowledge of *In Memoriam James Joyce* marks the shift at the superstructural level from an elitist modernism to a postcolonial postmodernity reflecting broader societal changes in the political and economic spheres that the poet manifests in his work. This identifying marxist poet adjures the Scots to evolve politically as he has done poetically:

> what the Scottish people need above all to-day to realize is that (in keeping with all that is really valuable in their past) static adherence to any particular

> methodology marks the decline of civilization, for the temporal character of the universe decrees that the only alternative to advance is decay[243]

MacDiarmid wants contemporary Scots to find the dynamic diversity and internationalism of their true pre-Union traditions and identity in order to radically free the nation from the cultural and political stagnation of adherence to English metropolitanism and international capital. MacDiarmid's elitism remains pronounced throughout his artistic evolution. Yet, despite his exasperation at the intellectual level of the universal majority and a very particular scorn for the apparent political and cultural indifferentism of his native folk, MacDiarmid stays true to his elect faith in the radical and evolutionary potential of creative generalist thought and high art to transcend a capitalist order that spiritually enfeebles and politically disenfranchises the masses:

> Perpetual mental progress is neither impossible nor inevitable.
> In the end its acid power will disintegrate
> All the force and flummery of current passions and pretences,
> Eat the life out of every false loyalty and craven creed,
> And bite its way through to a world of light and truth.[244]

[243] *LP*, p. 154.
[244] *CP2*, p. 1109 ('Once in a Cornish Garden').

Conclusion **THE BATTLE CONTINUES**

MacDiarmid's politics seek to unify a place he perceives to be provincialized and dualistically ruptured primarily through Union with England, but also by other historical fissures such as the Reformation and the Anglophone Scottish Enlightenment. His nationalism envisions a metaphysical Scotland, a transcendental 'Separatism' that sings with 'a sword-like sang / That can cut Scotland clear / O' a' the warld'.[1] The self-appointed national bard wants 'Our multiform, our infinite Scotland' eternalized in a verse which, through the mystical 'act of surmounting' the crude divisions of the actual, attempts to see Scotland whole:

> So I hold all Scotland
> In my vision now
> – A Falkirk Tryst of endless comprehension and love.[2]

The search for the metaphysical Scot initiated by MacDiarmid in Montrose, a place from which he endeavours to internationalize politically and culturally a provincialized national scene, combines with a spiritualized communism that aims to enlarge the evolutionary potentialities of humanity, creatively individualizing the masses through a marxist materialism that mainly concerns the elect poet for what he disinterestedly perceives to be its cultural promise:

> Man does not cease to interest me
> When he ceases to be miserable.
> Quite the contrary!
> That it is important to aid him
> In the beginning goes without saying,
> Like a plant it is essential
> To water at first;
> But this is in order to get it to flower,

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[1] *CP1*, p. 273 (*To Circumjack Cencrastus*).
[2] *CP2*, p. 1170 ('Direadh I'); *LP*, p. 255; *CP2*, p. 1170 ('Dìreadh I'). The Falkirk Tryst was the main cattle market in Scotland after c.1770; according to No'am Newman, 'in the late 18th century it was the name given to a Highland piping competition', <www.greenmanreview.com/iainmacinnes.html>.

And I *am concerned with the blossom.*[3]

From the synthesis of Scottish nationalism and international communism issues a radical Scottish Republicanism, a censored cultural and political tradition uncovered by the autodidact poet in Shetland. MacDiarmid's part in rescuing John Maclean from what David Howell refers to as 'the near-oblivion that enveloped his reputation after his premature death in November 1923' has still not been fully explored.[4] It was Maclean's desire to see a socialist revolution take place in an independent Scotland, his fusion of international workers' radicalism in a politically self-determined national setting, which stimulates MacDiarmid's own Scottish Republicanism. The poet believes this radical republican tradition in Scottish politics to be hidden by the Unionist historiography of a bourgeois Scottish educational system perniciously bound to the specialization of capitalism, and the black arts of a Scottish media thirled to a more lucrative, larger British market.

The absolutist striving for unity in MacDiarmid's politics of place finds alliance with a modernism that often imperialistically universalizes its own metropolitan concerns. According to Raymond Williams in his 'Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism', 'the key cultural factor of the modernist shift is the character of the metropolis'.[5] Seeking wealth, opportunity and escape from the confines of the provinces in the imperial capitals of the late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century, immigrant artists to the metropolis ensured that, as Robert Crawford says, 'most of the High Modernists did not come from the centre of English culture'.[6] However, by migrating to and choosing to practise their art from that ideological centre, modernists such as Eliot and Conrad amongst others, negate the autochthonous

[3] *CP2*, pp. 1059-60 ('Reflections in a Slum').
[4] David Howell, *A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 157.
[5] Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. and intro. Tony Pinkey (London & New York: Verso, 1999; 1989), p. 45.
[6] Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 270.

culture of the margins to the benefit of the core culture. As such, their work assumes 'universal' appeal to the detriment of 'local' political and cultural difference:

> There is an argument on the side of 'modernism' that can minimise particular social influences on behalf of some greater 'universal' but this strikes me as valid only to a point, beyond which it degenerates into yet another elitist attack on the 'local', to use the term Tom Leonard and others would apply, and ultimately leads back to the marginalisation of indigenous cultures.[7]

James Kelman's point has some application to the modernist MacDiarmid's elect attitude to the Scots and Scotland. From a postcolonial perspective, MacDiarmid's scornful stance mirrors his anglophobic Othering of the English, distorting the heterogeneous potentialities of Scottishness to the essentialist shape of the poet's own national vision. However, such contemporary theoretical pluralism ignores the dismal political and cultural reality as witnessed by MacDiarmid on return to Scotland from an imperial First World War. Animated by the Bolshevik Revolution and the Irish war of independence, the modernist MacDiarmid's radical politicization of a Scotland parochially subsumed in a multinational state governed by English metropolitan monetarism and addicted to pledging political allegiance to monarchical British Labour Unionism challenges what Williams calls 'the metropolitan interpretation of its own processes as universals'.[8] An internationalist politics quickened by small-town Langholm and the debatable land of the Scottish Borders, and practised from the marginality of Montrose and Whalsay, produces a more tellingly native correspondence between the universal and the local than that of metropolitan modernists. MacDiarmid's provincialist-internationalist poetry achieves a

> wavering balance
> Between unity and great achievement on the one hand

[7] James Kelman, *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural & Political* (Stirling: AK Press, 1992), p. 22.
[8] Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*, p. 47.

And particularism and chaos on the other[9]

In particular, the scale of MacDiarmid's achievement in Montrose should not be underestimated. From a peripheral location, the modernist MacDiarmid creatively attempts the cultural and political reinvention of Scotland. His engagement with the Montrose community over a period of almost ten years in the 1920s, principally through his work as a journalist for the *Montrose Review* and his industry as a socialist on the local council, facilitates the evolution of MacDiarmid's political thinking on the future shape of an internationalist independent Scotland. Committed to local concerns, MacDiarmid energetically mixes political and cultural propaganda for a Scottish Renaissance with a modernist poetry written in a distinctly Scots voice. Through his fusion of Scottish nationalism and international political radicalism, finding practical application first in Montrose but subsequently given more incisive theoretical design in Whalsay, MacDiarmid strives to integrate a divisively divergent oppositional politics in Scotland. Seeking a poetry with 'the power / Of fusing the discordant qualities of experience' and a capacity for 'holding together opposites', MacDiarmid's radical Scottish Republican politics of place has delineated lines of poetic and political development for Scottish culture into the twenty-first century. [10]

However, MacDiarmid's cultural and political legacy is by no means secure, even in Scotland. His creative covenant to internationalize a provincialized Scotland and radically relate his writing to the material transformations of society – in keeping with the historical progressivism underlying his spiritual evolutionism – has been largely misunderstood by a new generation of writers equipped with artistic agendas at odds with that of his modernist elitism. MacDiarmid's tussle with Alexander Trocchi at the 1962 Edinburgh Festival is perhaps characteristic of a generational rift that has not necessarily been bridged in the present.

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[9] *CP2*, p. 1012 ('The Kind of Poetry I Want').
[10] *CP2*, p. 1095 ('The Terrible Crystal').

MacDiarmid already had difficulties with what he saw as the false internationalism and concomitant 'commodity-fetishistic attitude' of the Festival since its inception in the capital in 1947.[11] A neglect of Scottish culture accompanied by an expensive ticketing policy 'is very popular with our cultural provincials. Its borrowed plumes are designed to dazzle our wealthier yokels'.[12] For MacDiarmid, the Festival is not for the ordinary people of Edinburgh but rich tourists, London luvvies and the Anglicized upper-middle class of the city more interested in 'the beat o' the drums / And the blare o' the brass' of the Tattoo's celebration of Scottish imperial militarism than high art:

> Culture? Dinna gar me laugh.
> The Edinburgh Festival's blawn the gaff
> Aince for a' on that highbrow rot.[13]

Despite his hostility, MacDiarmid met Trocchi and a host of other writers, native and foreign, to discuss 'Scottish Writing Today'. From this event surfaced Trocchi's accusation that MacDiarmid had infamously called him and other Beat writers 'cosmopolitan scum'.[14]

The argument between MacDiarmid and Trocchi is not made easier to resolve by the confusion or ill definition of terms such as internationalist, provincial and cosmopolitan. Trocchi's internationalism took him away from Scotland and his Scottish-Italian roots in Glasgow. Committed to societal change, his route was through the ahistorical radical individualism of the sixties counter-culture and what he believed to be the consciousness expanding use of drugs. MacDiarmid's internationalism is realized largely from small towns in Scotland, a place peripheralized through attachment to the capitalist values of English metropolitanism that he strives to

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[11] *A*, p. 126 ('Aesthetics in Scotland').
[12] Ibid.
[13] *CP2*, p. 1370 ('Edinburgh's Tattoo Culture').
[14] Andrew Murray Scott, *Alexander Trocchi: The Making of the Monster* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p. 108; see Ch. 7 for a fuller account of this Festival flyting.

reinvigorate through a radical republican political tradition and a cultural modernism he believes should be available to the workers. The autodidact poet's historical materialism understands that the transformation of society can only come through a generalist knowledge; his spiritual evolutionism pursues the enlargement of consciousness through the power of words.

MacDiarmid worried that his political commitment to a radical Scotland would compromise his independency of creation as a poet:

> To subordinate my Muse to a cause
> So remote from literature
> Was to court failure as a poet,
> To risk having but one string to my lyre,
> And turning single-mindedness into obsession.[15]

He understands that 'The true poet never merely articulates a preconception of his tribe, but starts rather from an inner fact of his individual consciousness'.[16] For this modernist poet of peripheral place, however, that 'inner fact' is Scotland, equally a spiritual inspiration and a political cause. It has become a journalistic cliché to say that modern politicians lack vision. Such a paucity of transformational political ideas has had a particularly detrimental effect in Scotland, provincially wedded to the monarchical constitutionalism of the English parliamentary system and continuing to inhibit potential independence through the coalitionary conformism of devolutionary party politics. The sacrificial, foundational myths central to Irish Republicanism employed by Yeats have no equivalence in Scotland where a politically useful myth history has been obscured by educational anglification and is sanitized by the monetary mandate of the Tourist Board. By uncovering a radical republican tradition, MacDiarmid hopes to offer Scotland an internationalist politics combining practical possibility and mythic vision. The desire for a 'Scotland seen, as Socialists have hoped

[15] *CP2*, p. 1168 ('Direadh I').
[16] *LP*, p. 59.

to see' it, for which the battle continues, intimately informs Hugh MacDiarmid's poetry and his radical Scottish Republican politics of place.[17]

[17] *CP2*, p. 1172 ('Direadh I').

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